



The BP exhibition

# Scythians warriors of ancient Siberia

Edited by St John Simpson  
and Svetlana Pankova

Organized with the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia

 **Thames & Hudson**

The British  
Museum

The BP exhibition *Scythians: warriors of ancient Siberia*  
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Frontispiece: detail of cat. 19, p. 61. Belt plaque with a monster attacking a horse.

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# Sponsor’s foreword

This exhibition is a very welcome window on a culture unfamiliar to many around the world, but which held sway for almost a millennium across vast swathes of Eurasia. Having lived and worked in Russia, it is fascinating to gain an insight into the lives of some of the modern nation’s oldest ancestors, weathering hardy conditions on the steppes to ride, fight and trade as far afield as the Black Sea, the Middle East and China.

Russia is rich in natural resources, and the Scythians were clearly masters of those resources, using animals and ores not just to survive, but also to enrich their existence and build a powerful military force. This is the first major exhibition in the UK about the Scythians for nearly forty years, and recent discoveries, from furs and felts to art and weaponry, reveal new details about their nomadic lifestyle and trading practices. We are very pleased, through our long-standing partnership with the British Museum, to help bring these new artefacts and the stories they reveal to as wide an audience as possible.

We would also like to thank the State Hermitage Museum for its support for the exhibition. BP is committed to enabling wider access to the very best art and culture in the countries in which we operate, and we have been a partner with the Hermitage in Russia for many years, and with the British Museum in the UK since 1996.

I would like to congratulate the curators on the creation of an important and historic exhibition, of which this catalogue is a visually striking record.

Bob Dudley  
Group Chief Executive, BP



# British Museum Director’s foreword

This exhibition looks at the disappearing world of the pastoral nomad and the rise and fall of the first great nomadic power, that of the Scythians. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BC, devoted almost an entire book to the Scythians. Viewed by some as ‘the father of history’ and unjustly condemned by others as ‘the father of lies’, Herodotus was a keen form of early ethnographer, but he was not that different from us. Political climates and educational upbringings shape modern understanding, and to many people high culture is synonymous with a developed state of sedentary life, while arts and crafts are the products of urban culture rather than the world of the nomad. Herodotus, like most of us, lived in a city in a world where manufacture is urban and food is provided by agriculture and farming. This exhibition shows how our conceptions, like those of our ancient predecessors from Greece, Assyria, Iran and China, are challenged by the reality of an alternative lifestyle that was born on the Eurasian steppe, and which was not only incredibly successful but also admired and feared in almost equal measure by their sedentary contemporaries.

Horses underpinned the nomadic lifestyle of the Scythians and were crucial to their lifestyle and survival; they provided the basis of their mobility and they were an important source of meat and milk. Pasture, water and herds are resources that require protection from people and predators, and it is unsurprising to find that Scythian life was punctuated by periodic violence and interpersonal conflict. This is referred to by classical writers and confirmed by excavated finds. The Scythians developed an effective set of weapons for use on foot or horseback; Greek authors referred to the ‘Scythian bow’ with awe. Life was tough, but these hardy warriors developed a complex and beautiful ‘Animal Style’ art, of which there are spectacular examples in our exhibition, ranging from gold belt buckles in Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection to body art from frozen tombs in the high Altai mountains of Siberia and stunning new archaeological discoveries.

This exhibition has been organized with our good colleagues at the State Hermitage Museum and includes very generous loans, among which are many pieces that have never previously been published or exhibited. We are delighted to welcome these objects to London. They document the development from the birth of Russian archaeology under Peter the Great to the multidisciplinary scientific work of our colleagues in the Hermitage today. We are also very pleased to bring other recently excavated objects from Eurasian nomad sites in modern Kazakhstan to London, and use this historic opportunity to develop the first collaboration between our museum and the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Astana. Finally, I would like to give my thanks to one of the British Museum’s longest-standing corporate partners, BP. This exhibition would not have been possible without their generous support.

Hartwig Fischer  
Director, British Museum, London



# State Hermitage Museum Director’s foreword

## From Siberia with Love

For many people around the world Siberia seems to be the very epitome of Russia: vast, cold and empty, little suited to human existence, a place of exile and suffering. In fact, Siberia is a huge historical and cultural region, a place where many cultures and civilizations have lived and developed, where one sees the fruits of centuries of interaction between different peoples, races and ways of life. It is largely thanks to archaeologists – Russian, Soviet, Siberian, Central Asian – that the true image of Siberia, its important role in world history, has been established and presented to the world. Aspects of Russia’s important contribution to our understanding of the history of mankind are thus on show in this exhibition.

The Scythians, a people renowned by Herodotus, have assumed a mystic significance in the context of Russian culture. *Scythians*, a famous and profoundly emotional work by the great Russian poet Alexander Blok, glorified this nomadic people who combined barbarian ferocity with exceptional talent, a people on whom European fates depended. He somewhat pompously identified the Scythians with the Russians, although that is incorrect, since the Scythians were an Iranian people. Yet they have become part of the poetics of Russian history.

In truth the life and movements of the Scythian tribes present an example of incredible cultural interaction and the creation of genuine cultural unity across the territory of Eurasia.

Scythian raids, Scythian wealth, the magnificent art of the Scythians, their role in the historic symbiosis of nomads and settled peoples – all have been the subject of extensive study and numerous scholarly disputes, as well as providing the material for some impressive museum displays: some of that material is being shown in London. ‘Scythian gold’ and the ‘Scythian Animal Style’ are among the most attractive artefacts in the museum world. For decades the Hermitage has played the most active of roles in the study of Siberia and of Scythian culture. Hundreds of expeditions have been undertaken, hundreds of scholarly works published, dozens of exhibitions have gained fame across the world. That celebrated little figure of a Scythian stag has become a visual symbol of the Hermitage itself, an immediately recognizable logo.

Scythians are also present in the Russian national psychology in the form of ‘the Scythian war’. Historical sources relate that when attacked the Scythians pretended to flee in defeat, drawing the enemy deep into the steppe, where they suddenly turned on them and destroyed them. Such was their response to Achaemenid forces. And in modern history Russia too has made use of its vast territory to apply the same tactics to war. Such was Russia’s response to Polish, Swedish, French and German invasions. This manner of pretending defeat was part of the Scythian heritage.

The essence of that heritage lies in the intriguing interaction between cultures from China to Greece and Mesopotamia, the creation of a highly individual artistic style, and in the many remaining political and stylistic riddles. It is one of the key subjects of archaeology in Russia today. The whole world is aware

of our famous excavations and the incredible results they bring. Russian archaeology was founded with Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection but continued to develop through very different periods of national history. During one-dimensional and authoritarian times archaeology proved to be a rewarding way of putting humanitarian skills to good use and thus it is that looking at the study of Siberia and the Scythians we find the names of some of the great men of the historical sciences in Russia. Their monumental works and monumental discussions helped advance learning and knowledge. Their fieldwork enriched our museums. Scholarly and poetic images laid the foundation for the self-awareness of many peoples across Eurasia.

This exhibition tells the parallel tales of these rare monuments of past civilizations and the history of their study. These are two things which are closely linked. There is no history without interpretation. Art suffers without explanation. And behind it all are the people, both ancient and modern. Any Hermitage exhibition is simultaneously an exhibition about the Hermitage itself. This exhibition is about the Hermitage’s long-standing relations with the British Museum, to which we are bound by a tradition of academic collaboration, not least in the study of the ancient cultures of Eurasia. Through our combined efforts today we can bring Siberia and the Scythians even closer to European viewers. This will not only entertain but, I hope, give those viewers new cause to ponder on the fate of the world.

Mikhail Piotrovsky  
Director, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

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State Hermitage Museum Curator of the exhibition

Conservation works for the exhibited objects were undertaken under the direction of the Head of the Department of Scientific Restoration and Conservation Tatiana Baranova

Photography is by the Photographic Studio of the State Hermitage Museum directed by Vladimir Terebenin



# Introduction

St J. Simpson and S. V. Pankova

The Scythian nomads controlled a vast area stretching from the edge of northern China to the northern Black Sea region. Originating in southern Siberia, they dominated the Eurasian steppe for centuries until they were displaced by other Eurasian nomad tribes at the beginning of the second century bc. Although the Greeks referred to them as ‘barbarians’, this term was applied to all non-Greeks, and the nomads developed a rich material culture with a strong visual language involving fierce contorted animal designs known as ‘Animal Style’ art. This is found on the decorated ends of torcs, bangles and dagger pommels, gold and bronze belt buckles, saddle covers and even body tattoos. The Scythians were skilled at working metals and softer materials such as bone, horn and wood, which were sometimes highlighted with paint, appliqués or colourful sheet-metal overlays; this allowed sparing use of precious metal yet the appearance was spectacularly like solid metal. As pastoral nomads they kept large herds and had plentiful supplies of leather, wool and hair, which not only provided the basis for clothing and soft furnishings but were also easily traded resources in constant demand from their sedentary neighbours. There was regular contact with these: the fifth-century bc historian Herodotus met Scythians in Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea coast; Greek and Assyrian histories record that they fought their way into Anatolia; and they proved a constant threat to the Achaemenid Persian Empire on its eastern frontier in Central Asia. These contacts, whether through conflict, trade or marriage, explain why Achaemenid silver, gold and even carpets ended up in nomad tombs, how Scythian-related goldwork forms part of the Oxus Treasure found near the river Amu darya (Oxus) in its eastern province of Bactria, and why many design motifs are shared by both the Scythian and Achaemenid worlds.

Ancient authors described these peoples where they encountered them at the fringes, but one of the regions where this early nomadic lifestyle first developed was Tuva (fig. 1), at the junction of the Siberian *taiga* and the Altai-Sayan mountains. It is here that the earliest manifestations of the so-called ‘Scythian triad’ of weapons, horse harness and Animal Style art emerges in the ninth and eighth centuries bc, and archaeological excavations at Arzhan reveal burials of elite individuals interred with their wives or concubines, attendants, and horses. This area is at the heart of southern Siberia and connected by a continuous corridor of grassy pasture to northern China and the Black Sea region. This biome (ecological area) is wider than the vast empire of the Achaemenids, which united the Near East between the sixth and fourth centuries bc, and the Scythians outlasted them, as they had their Late Assyrian and Median predecessors. The Scythians were finally overwhelmed and dissipated by later tribal groups. Roman and Byzantine authors continued to refer to their nomad successors in the Black Sea region and Central Asia as Scythians, but the cultures were changing, and Iranian was replaced by Turkic languages. China was now the dominant political power and there were stronger links with that culture than previously. Deep in the resource-rich but isolated Minusinsk basin, the so-called Tashtyk culture developed during the early centuries ad; this is the focus of the conclusion to the exhibition.

The story behind the objects presented here begins with chance finds made deep in southern Siberia during the eighteenth century. The Russian conquest of Siberia had begun in 1581/82 during the reign of Ivan IV, ‘the Terrible’ (1530–1584), with the defeat of the Tatar khan, Khimchum, by the Cossack commander Yermak. The numerous local tribes were required to pay heavy tribute in furs, a process known as the *yassak*.

Fig. 1  
Landscape view showing Scythian  
burial mounds in Tuva, southern  
Siberia.



Tsar Peter I, ‘the Great’ (1672–1725), began sending scientific expeditions to the region; it was during one of these that the strait separating Siberia from Alaska was discovered in 1728 and named after its finder, Vitus Bering (1681–1741). The exploration of Siberia was marked by amazing antiquarian discoveries as large burial mounds (*kurgans*) attracted the attention of engineers and grave robbers (*bugrovshchiki*). News of the discovery of fantastic gold ornaments in completely unfamiliar styles soon reached St Petersburg as a collection formed by one Demidov was presented to Peter in 1715. The Tsar issued an edict that any such finds, especially those ‘that are very old and uncommon’, should be sent to St Petersburg, and ordered that drawings be made ‘of everything that is found’. After his death they were transferred to the Kunstkamera (‘Cabinet of Curiosities’), which he had founded in 1714, the first museum in the country. In 1690 the Dutchman Nicolaas Witsen published the first map of Siberia, and two years later the first edition of his account entitled *Noord en Oost Tartarye*. In the same year one Andrei Lyzlov, said to be either a priest from Smolensk or a courtier from Moscow, wrote an account entitled *History of the Scythians*, and there was considerable academic interest in Russia into how these finds connected with the ancestral origins of the Slavs and other peoples, and therefore with the early formation of Russia itself (fig. 2).

During the second half of the eighteenth century, in the reign of Catherine II, ‘the Great’ (1729–1796), Russia occupied the northern coast of the Black Sea from the mouth of the river Dniester to the area around Kuban, and achieved its aim of obtaining

a warm-water port with access to the Mediterranean (fig. 3). As part of its so-called Greek Project – according to which Russia intended to oust the Turks from Europe and as self-styled heirs of the Byzantine Empire found an Empire of Constantinople – cities were given Greek names. In 1787 Catherine visited the area, and antiquarian travellers began to record sites and note the presence of ancient Greek inscriptions. The first *kurgan* was excavated in 1763 by General Alexey Melgunov (1722–1788), the governor of the Novorossiisk province. It was found to be a seventh-century bc Scythian tomb and proved accounts that the Scythians were active in this region from this early date. Within a year Herodotus’ *Histories* were translated into Russian for the first time, and a copy of a gold scabbard found by Melgunov was presented to the British Museum (fig. 4).

Other generals excavated a burial mound near the Black Sea port of Phanagoria, and initiated excavations at Olbia and Kerch at the eastern end of the Crimean peninsula. In 1830 a large kurgan at Kul’ Oba, near Kerch, began to be quarried for construction. Excavations immediately followed under the direction of Paul Du Brux, a French antiquarian who owned a private museum and was the chief customs officer in Kerch, and Ivan Stempkovsky, the governor of Kerch. An intact stone tomb measuring 20 sq. m was found to contain the bodies of what are believed to be a Scythian king and queen with numerous gold objects, a groom with a horse, armour, cauldrons, amphorae and drinking vessels. These objects were immediately acquired by the Imperial

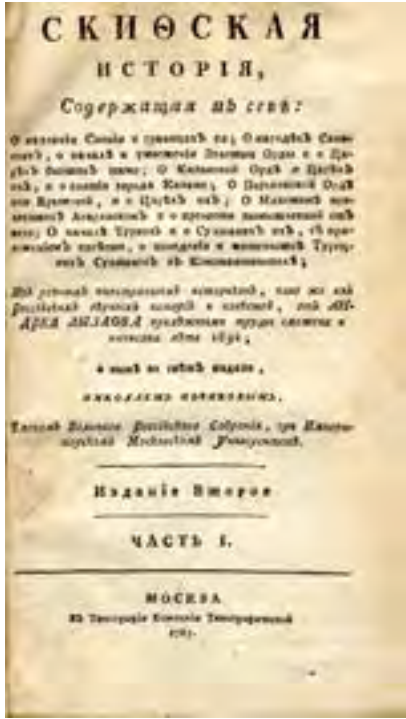


Fig. 2  
Frontispiece of the *History of the Scythians* by A. Lyzlov.  
London Library

Fig. 3  
Print showing the advance of Russia towards the Black Sea during the reign of Catherine II.  
Simon François Ravenet I after Nicholas Blakey, 1753  
H. 22.4, W. 17.1 cm  
British Museum, London, 1978, U.1663

Hermitage and formed the beginning of the museum’s archaeological collection. On 3 June 1837 an imperial decree stated that the Ministry of Internal Affairs be informed with ‘the appropriate accuracy and detail’ of all architectural finds, and the minister of internal affairs, Count Lev Perovsky, directed the first excavations of royal Scythian burial mounds in this region during the early 1850s. Further excavations, mainly on the Kerch and Taman peninsulas, were generously funded by the Ministry of the Imperial Court, and the finds inspired arts and crafts (fig. 5) and even the interior decor of the New Hermitage, which was intended as a museum and completed in 1851. The collection from the Kunstkamera was transferred to the Hermitage, where it was, and still is, known as ‘Peter I’s Siberian Collection’. In 1854 an album was published containing the most important finds and an Archaeological Commission was founded in 1859 with the following remit:

- (1) the search for antiquities, primarily those relating to Russian history and the life of the peoples who once inhabited the territory that is now occupied by Russia;
- (2) the collection of information on national and other antiquities located within the state;
- (3) the scientific study and evaluation of the antiquities discovered.<sup>1</sup>

Royal burial mounds and major sites continued to be the focus in the northern Black Sea region, and large numbers were explored (figs 6–7). The 20-m-high Alexandropol burial mound (also known as the Meadow Grave) was the first to be completely excavated, though most of the finds were lost during bombing in 1941. Other mounds were excavated between 1859 and 1863 by the historian Ivan Zabelin (1820–1908), including the Great Twin Barrow on the Taman peninsula and the famous burial mound of Chertomlyk. The latter stood 20 m high and up to 120 m across, with a massive outer stone wall and a complex tomb with side chambers at the centre: although the central chamber had been robbed in antiquity, valuable finds had been overlooked, and the side rooms still contained the remains of female and warrior burials with rich grave goods.

The exact find-spots of the earliest discoveries made during Peter’s reign remain unclear but are known to have been at different sites between the Ural and Altai mountain ranges in southern Siberia; this was supported by the discovery of typical Scythian objects during excavations in 1865 by academician V. V. Radlov at two large burial mounds (Berel, Katanda) in the Altai region. In 1889 the Archaeological Commission was given exclusive excavation rights and it was agreed that, while the most important finds



Fig. 4  
The Scythian gold scabbard known as the Melgunov scabbard.  
Seventh century BC  
L. 60 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1763 1-19, 20

Fig. 5  
A gold Scythian bracelet found in 1869 in the fourth-century BC burial mound of Temir-Gora, near Kerch in the northern Black Sea region. Bracelets like this inspired Russian jewelers to make and exhibit copies, and these were copied again by continental European and English firms.  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, TG-6

should be sent to the Hermitage, other pieces could be distributed to local museums. The academician and professor at St Petersburg University Nikolai Veselovsky (1848–1918) led a series of highly successful expeditions to the northern Caucasus and Black Sea region, where he excavated the major burial mounds Oguz (1891–4), Kostromskaya (1897), Kelermes (1904, 1908), Ulsky (1908–10) and Solokha (1912–13); it was in this last mound that he found some of the most spectacular examples of Greco-Scythian goldworking, including a comb topped with a battle scene, a golden phiale (a shallow drinking vessel) with animal designs, an overlay for a bow case with a scene from a Scythian epic and a silver cup depicting a Scythian hunting scene (see Chapter 1).<sup>2</sup>

In October 1917 Russia was convulsed by revolution and the Hermitage was stormed. Huge social changes began to be implemented, and in the first few months the Soviet authorities established a Committee of the North in order to protect twenty-six ethnic groups in Siberia who were considered at greatest risk: they were exempted from military conscription and taxation, offered basic social amenities, and an attempt was made to teach in native tongues, acknowledging their nomadic existence by schooling in tents. There was also a huge increase in the number of local history societies and museums across the country. However, these measures were short-lived and the individuals concerned were soon accused of supporting local patriotism over national interests.<sup>3</sup> In 1929/30 communist collectivization of food production began to be imposed across Russia, nomads were settled, owners of large herds were deported, shamans were outlawed and children were put into Russian boarding schools. It was immediately afterwards, in 1931, that a detailed census was carried out, which formed the basis for a landmark study by S. Vainshtein of the disappearing nomad economy of the Tuva region.<sup>4</sup> During the 1960s local collective farms reorganized into larger enterprises, and the integration of local and Russian populations increased.

In the meantime, on 18 April 1919 the Imperial Archaeological Commission had been dissolved and replaced by the Institute for the History of Material Culture (Lenin personally added the word ‘history’ to its founding edict), and money poured into archaeological projects from the 1930s onwards.<sup>5</sup> The Hermitage created three new departments – one

that became the Oriental Department in 1920, the Department of Prehistoric Societies (now the Department of the Archaeology of Eastern Europe and Siberia) in 1931, and the Department of the History of Russian Culture in 1941 – and it enjoyed an almost unbroken sequence of directors who were themselves archaeologists. During this period archaeology became politicized and seen as an opportunity for the Soviet authorities to find evidence for Marx’s classification of society into developmental stages, beginning from a pre-class stage through stages of slave-owning, feudalism and capitalism before attaining a classless society with communism as its climax. The superiority of Slavs over Germanic peoples was emphasized while Russia and Germany were at war; cases of ethnogenesis, or the emergence of ethnic groups, were sought within the Soviet Union, and the definition of archaeological cultures and their relationship to linguistic boundaries and peoples were debated.

The origins of the Scythians continued to attract different views. Some Russian scholars saw them as originating in the northern Black Sea region, in the area where they were described by Herodotus. Academician Mikhail Rostovtzeff (1870–1952) interpreted them as a feudal military power, and was the first to begin defining them as an archaeological culture on the grounds of the standard appearance of their burial mounds and other features.<sup>6</sup> The Moscow professor Boris Grakov (1899–1970) was the first to excavate large numbers of simple burial mounds belonging to ‘the common people’, in contrast with the previous focus on ‘royal’ mounds; he also thoroughly explored a hill fort at Kamenka, interpreted the Scythians’ social development in Marxist terms as a stage of transition from military democracy to a slave-owning society, and saw the spread of the so-called ‘Scythian triad’ as evidence for the Scythianization of the indigenous forest-steppe population.<sup>7</sup> The coexistence of two different Scythian cultures, on the steppe and in the forest-steppe, was instead advocated by Mikhail Artamonov (1898–1972), who later became director of the Hermitage. He wrote extensively on how much Scythian art showed Near Eastern inspiration and emphasized that the Scythians were Iranians rather than Slavs.<sup>8</sup> His successor, B. B. Piotrovsky (1908–1990), went on to find dramatic evidence for Scythian military activity in the Caucasus during his excavations of an





Uartian fortress at Karmir Blur in Armenia, which had been violently sacked, but distinguishing between objects made by Scythians and the Cimmerians, their early northern rivals in the northern Black Sea region, proved to be a long-running issue.

These and other debates rumbled on for decades, and as late as 1979 the head of Soviet archaeology for thirty years, Boris Rybakov (1908–2001), stated in a book entitled *The Scythians of Herodotus* that the land-tilling Scythian tribes in the northern Black Sea region were the possible ancestors of later Slav tribes, making a tenuous philological link between the Skolotoi (a name given by Herodotus for other Scythian tribes) and the Sklavins (the Greek for Slavs). However, during the 1920s an ethnological expedition began work in Altai and had already challenged the idea that Scythians originated in the Black Sea region. In 1927 the Russian Museum in Leningrad excavated another burial mound in the central Altai region at Shibe and found it to be very similar to those previously excavated by Radlov. Three years earlier Sergey Rudenko (1885–1969), head of the ethnography section of the Russian Museum in Leningrad, had discovered a group of burial mounds at Pazyryk, and he excavated the first in 1929 with his Siberian-born student Mikhail Gryaznov (1902–1984). Conditions were tough. There were no roads or nearby food supplies, the team had to employ children as labourers, horses were used to drag away the heaviest boulders and water had to be boiled by the side of the trench to melt the permafrost (pp. 98–99; fig. 8).

In the meantime there were serious political problems in Leningrad as Stalin began the ‘Great Terror’ in

1934 with a purge of the intelligentsia as well as the political and military command. A witch-hunt was instigated against individuals who had used ‘bourgeois’ classifications, such as Bronze or Iron Age; ‘archaeology’ was replaced by ‘Marxist history of material culture’; over fifty curators at the Hermitage were deported or executed; and the leading Leningrad archaeologist Aleksandr Miller (1875–1935) was sent to Siberia for ‘writing long drawn-out reports on things he had excavated’, as this was condemned as ‘empiricism’.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, collaboration with Russians working abroad, particularly in Germany, was banned and scholars were arrested as spies. Rudenko himself was arrested in 1933, accused of pointless investigations and ethnographic idealism, and spent years working in the northern labour camps (although ironically he was promoted because of his knowledge of hydrology and proved invaluable for his ‘ice forecasts’ during the Soviet supply of the besieged city of Leningrad across the frozen Lake Ladoga in the Second World War). His colleague Gryaznov was also charged with being an underground fascist working with Ukrainian and Russian nationalists, and was exiled internally for three years. In 1941 the Pazyryk collection was transferred from the Russian Museum to the Hermitage, but from September that year until January 1944 Leningrad was besieged by the German army, and it was not until 1947 that Rudenko and Gryaznov returned to Pazyryk, where over three more seasons they excavated the four remaining mounds under the auspices of the Institute of the History of Material Culture, which retains the archives, and the Hermitage, where the finds were deposited.

Fig. 6  
The interior of a large burial mound known as the ‘Tomb of Mithridates’ near the Lazaretto of Kerch. Edmund Walker in 1856, after a view by Carlo Bossoli  
H. 18.4, W. 28.5 cm  
British Museum, London, 1982.U.687  
Donated by Westminster City Council

Fig. 7  
Ruins of ancient Chersonesos. Jonathan Needham in 1856, after a view by Carlo Bossoli  
H. 18.8, W. 28.3 cm  
British Museum, London, 1982.U.699  
Donated by Westminster City Council

Although all the tombs had been robbed and there was therefore virtually nothing of intrinsic value remaining, the frozen conditions stemming from the percolation of water into the tomb promoted exceptional preservation of the organic remains, which revolutionized the appreciation of Scythian everyday life.<sup>10</sup>

Rudenko and Gryaznov shared the same building but parted academic ways and never spoke to each other again. Rudenko established a laboratory of archaeological technology in his institute and championed the application of natural sciences in archaeology. Gryaznov went on to head the Central Asia and Caucasus section: he maintained that archaeological cultures were stages or phases in local development rather than evidence of separate cultures, but his excavations at the early Scythian burial mound at Arzhan-1 overturned earlier views and showed that what was now known as the ‘Scythian triad’ already existed in the Tuva region by the late ninth or early eighth century BC, and that this was not a development of the Black Sea or Iran.<sup>11</sup> Although there are similarities in the material culture and pastoral economy, there are also differences in detail of dress, burial customs, pottery and other aspects of lifestyle, and it is better to regard these as evidence for a shifting confederation of powerful tribes united within a Scythian cultural world.

Archaeological research on Scythians is continuing, with excavations each year across the Eurasian steppe, extending from Mongolia through Kazakhstan and Russia to Ukraine. A Ukrainian–German expedition returned to Chertomlyk between 1979 and 1986

and added considerable new evidence for how the mound was built.<sup>12</sup> Between 2001 and 2004 a Russian–German expedition directed by K. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler fully excavated another burial mound at Arzhan in Tuva, and proved that the Black Sea tradition of interring large quantities of gold did extend to this region.<sup>13</sup> During the 1990s archaeologists from Novosibirsk excavated more ‘frozen mummies’ at unrobbed burial mounds on the Ukok plateau, next to the Chinese border (fig. 9), and in neighbouring Kazakhstan the burial mound of Berel-11 was explored by a Kazakh–French expedition and shown to belong to the same culture as Pazyryk (see pp. 100–103). Concerns that global warming will lead to the melting of the permafrost, which has been the sole reason why these tombs have yielded such exceptional finds, means that these excavations are as much rescue as research.<sup>14</sup> Other expeditions are recording the rich rock art traditions, and large areas that include later period sites such as Oglakhty have been designated nature reserves (see p. 342).

Collaborative research and the use of scientific techniques are now common: dendrochronological and radiocarbon dates are refining the dating of sites,<sup>15</sup> advances in bioarchaeology are adding information on the genetics, diet and health of both horse and human populations,<sup>16</sup> and detailed analyses of metalwork and textiles are throwing new light on technologies.<sup>17</sup> This book of the exhibition is intended to show some of these results and how far we have progressed beyond the writings of Herodotus and the first antiquarian discoveries during the reign of Peter the Great.<sup>18</sup>

Fig. 8  
Excavations in progress at the burial mound of Pazyryk-2 in 1948. Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture, St Petersburg, I-32719



Fig. 9  
Excavations of a ‘frozen mummy’ at Ak-Alakha-3 on the Ukok plateau.





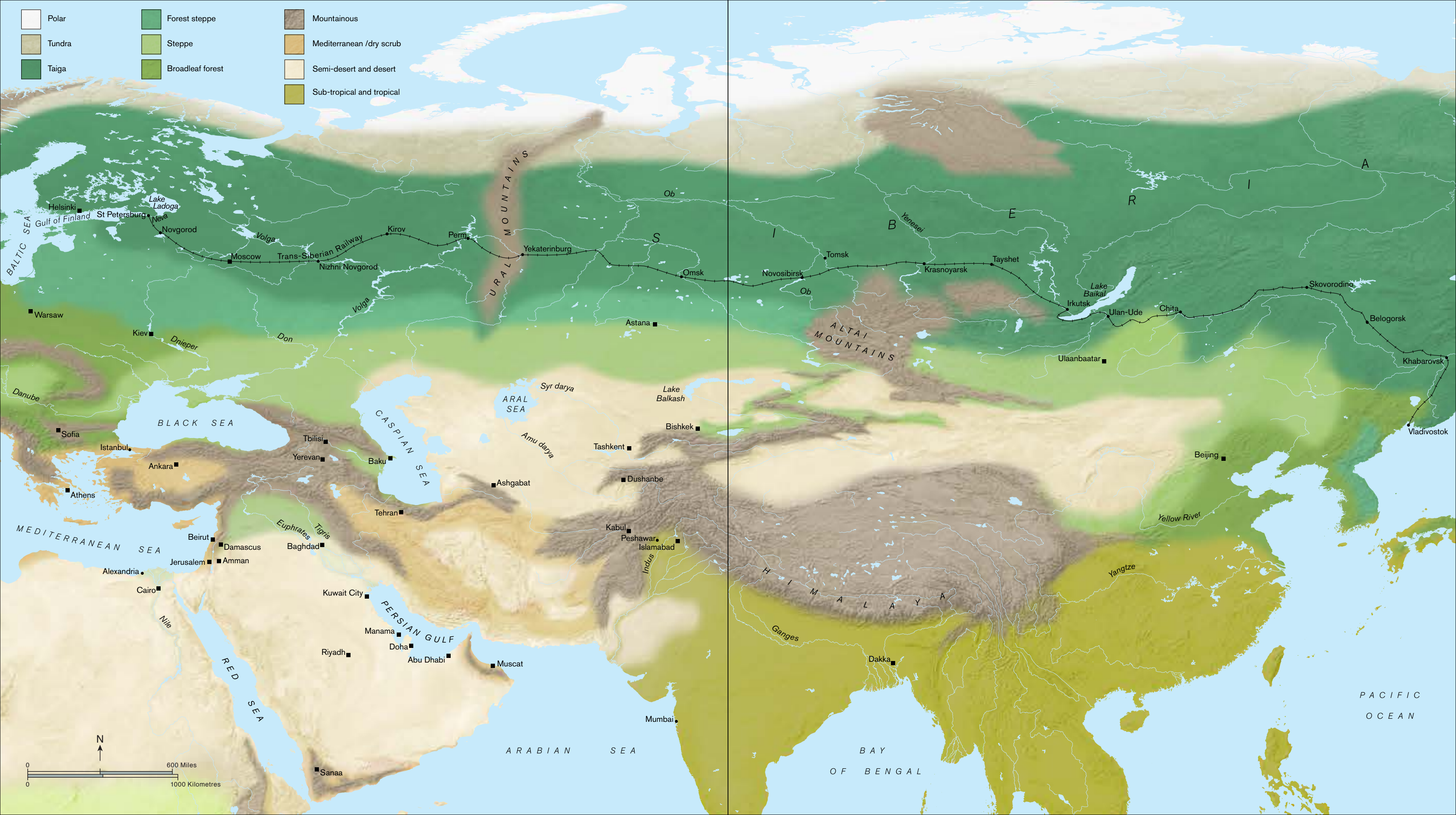


A. Yu. Alexeyev

# **1 The Scythians in Eurasia**



- |                    |                              |                                       |
|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <div></div> Polar  | <div></div> Forest steppe    | <div></div> Mountainous               |
| <div></div> Tundra | <div></div> Steppe           | <div></div> Mediterranean /dry scrub  |
| <div></div> Taiga  | <div></div> Broadleaf forest | <div></div> Semi-desert and desert    |
|                    |                              | <div></div> Sub-tropical and tropical |





# The Scythians in Eurasia

A. Yu. Alexeyev

How many the Scythians are I was not able to learn with exactness, but the accounts which I heard concerning their number did not tally, some saying that they are very many, and some that they are but few, so far as they are true Scythians.<sup>1</sup>

The early Iron Age, which broadly corresponds to the early first millennium BC, was a golden period not just for the great civilizations of Greece, Assyria, Iran and China, but also for their northern nomadic neighbours. These nomads developed a mobile type of pastoral economy in about 1000 BC that quickly spread over the broad belt of steppe and lower mountain ranges that transects Eurasia. This natural corridor unified a vast horizontal geographic space stretching from Central Asia in the east to the Hungarian plain in the west (fig. 10). Long after the Scythians and other early nomads had disappeared, they were remembered for their expressive art and intense interactions with neighbouring states.

The term ‘Scythians’ is a collective name for a number of migratory tribes who enjoyed a similar lifestyle, culture, economy and set of beliefs. It was introduced by the Greeks who first encountered them during the seventh century BC in Anatolia and along the northern Black Sea littoral, where Greek colonies began to be founded after about 650 BC. The Persians, meanwhile, referred to Asian and European nomads alike as *Sakā*. The Scythians – or at any rate those who lived north of the Black Sea in the fifth century BC – called themselves *Skoloti*,<sup>2</sup> after their legendary king Colaxais.<sup>3</sup> They not only had different names but also various customs, and the world of the steppes was diverse, sometimes confusingly so.

A feature that united the Scythian tribes, and which probably facilitated the contact they had with some of their neighbours, was that – unlike later Eurasian

nomads (Huns, Avars, Pechenegs, Khazars, Cumans, Mongols and so on) – all Scythians spoke early Iranian dialects, as is attested by the personal and tribal names that survive in foreign sources, whether Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek or Latin.<sup>4</sup> Another characteristic common to all Scythian tribes is their distinctive decorative art. From the seventh to the fourth centuries BC, this was dominated by the so-called ‘Scythian Animal Style’, a unique semiotic system that expressed various ideas – religious, mythological and aesthetic – exclusively through zoomorphic or animal-form imagery. Developed in Central Asia by 900 BC, this style retained to the end a very distinctive visual language based on three motifs: a feline predator (fig. 11), a bird of prey (fig. 12) and a herbivore with hooves and antlers (fig. 13). Over the centuries several local versions of these developed.

Scythian political history is only known to us in its general outline. The available sources are fragmentary; nomadic tribes were mobile and ethnic nomenclature was not always consistent, and it is impossible to trace in detail the centuries-long migratory movements.

In the eastern part of the Scythian world, Chinese chronicles refer to the Xirong (‘western warlike people’), Dingling and Yuezhi, later followed by the Xiongnu. The central regions – the southern Ural mountains, modern Kazakhstan, the eastern Caspian shore and the area south of the Aral Sea – were occupied by the Arimaspi, Issedones and Massagetae, all of whom Greek authors considered to be related to the Scythians. Neighbours of the Massagetae were the *Sakā*, well known to the Persians, who fought several wars with them from the 530s BC onwards. The fifth-century BC historian Herodotus and some Persian sources subdivided these into different tribes, including ‘pointed-hat Scythians’ (*Sakā tigraxaudā*)<sup>5</sup> and

## PAGES 18–19

Fig. 10  
Biome map showing the main ecological zones of Eurasia.

## OPPOSITE

Fig. 11  
Gold plaque in the shape of a coiled panther (cat. 16). Fourth to third century BC. W. 8.9, L. 10.9 cm, wt 221.91 g. Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/88

Fig. 12  
Gold belt plaque in the form of a bird. Second half of the seventh century BC. H. 6 cm. Found at Melgunov (Litoi) burial mound, Dnieper region. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1763 1/10

Fig. 13  
Gold bow-case ornament in the form of a reclining stag. Fifth to fourth century BC. L. 31.5 cm. Kul’ Oba burial mound, northern Black Sea region. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Ko 120







‘haoma-consuming Scythians’ (*Sakā haumavargā*)<sup>6</sup> (see Chapter 4).

The inhabitants of western and southern Siberia and of the Altai mountains were close to the Scythians. The famous finds of organic material of fur, leather, felt, cloth, wood and horn from the fifth- to the third-century BC ‘frozen burial mounds’ of the Altai offer a unique anthropological glimpse of this tribal culture. Herodotus and other classical authors describe the westernmost part of the Scythian world, bordering on the Black Sea and the Caucasus. It was populated by numerous ‘barbarians’: the Scythians proper (some nomadic, others sedentary) and other tribes of similar language and lifestyle, such as the Sarmatians, the Neuri and Androphagi, the Budini and Gelonians, the Tauri and Maeotians, the Massagetae and Issedones. Some of these flourished in the time of Herodotus; others were perhaps earlier. A few are evidently mythical, such as the Gerrhi, ‘the farthest distant of all tribes under their rule’, whose land was the burial place of Scythian kings,<sup>7</sup> or the ‘gold-guarding griffins’ of the Altai.<sup>8</sup>

To outsiders such as Herodotus the Scythians appeared conservative and unwilling to adopt foreign customs: ‘as regards foreign usages, the Scythians (as others) are wondrous loth to practise those of any other country’,<sup>9</sup> but in reality their attitude was dynamic and open. Theoretically pastoralists can live in isolation, but in fact they coexist and interact with their sedentary neighbours. The latter introduced the Scythians to their customs and ‘civilized’ goods such as wine, jewelry, metal and pottery vessels, but they

were equally susceptible to migrations, military expeditions, nomadic raids and even conquests, and there was therefore an exchange of ideas as well as traditions between the two economies.<sup>10</sup>

The beginnings of Scythian history are marked by an event that became the subject of myth and legend: in the eighth century BC the Massagetae and Issedones pushed the neighbouring Scythians into the northern Caucasus and northern Black Sea littoral from their Asian homeland to the east,<sup>11</sup> and they in turn expelled the local Cimmerian inhabitants. According to Herodotus, the Cimmerians were ‘driven from their homes by the nomad Scythians, came into Asia, and took Sardis, all but the citadel’;<sup>12</sup> some ‘fought with each other till they were dead’, whereas others decided ‘their business was to withdraw themselves and that there was no need to risk their lives ... the country being empty, the Scythians came and took possession of it’.<sup>13</sup> He continues:

The Cimmerians in their flight from the Scythians into Asia did also make a colony on the peninsula where now the Greek city of Sinope has been founded; and it is manifest that the Scythians pursued after them and invaded Media, missing their way; for the Cimmerians ever fled by the way of the coast, and the Scythians pursued with the Caucasus on their right till where they came into the Median land, turning inland on their way. I have now related this other tale, which is told alike by Greeks and foreigners.<sup>14</sup>

Fig. 14  
Decorated gold bowls found at Kelermes, north-west Caucasus. Seventh century BC. H. 7.5–8.5 cm. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Ky 1903 2/37

Fig. 15  
Gold ornament found at Kelermes, north-west Caucasus. Eighth to seventh century BC. L. 19.2 cm. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Ky 1904 1/11-12

The origin of the Scythians remains enigmatic and since antiquity has been the subject of varied and sometimes contradictory interpretations. Thus, Herodotus gives three different accounts of early Scythian history, which were partly illustrated in so-called ‘Greco-Scythian’ decorative art. First, according to Greek tradition, ‘Heracles, driving the cattle of Geryones, came to this land, which was then desert, but is now inhabited by the Scythians’;<sup>15</sup> ‘there he found in a cave a creature of double form that was half damsel and half serpent’;<sup>16</sup> with whom he had intercourse; ‘from Scythes son of Heracles comes the whole line of the kings of Scythia’.<sup>17</sup> Second, the Scythians themselves maintained ‘that their nation is the youngest in all the world, and that it came into being in this wise. There appeared in this country, being then desert, a man whose name was Targitaus. His parents, they say – for my part I do not believe this tale, but it is told – were Zeus and a daughter of the river Borysthenes’ (the modern Dnieper);<sup>18</sup> ‘he had three sons, Lipoxaïs, Arpoxaïs, and Colaxaïs, youngest of the three’;<sup>19</sup> ‘Lipoxaïs, it is said, was the father of the Scythian clan called Auchatae; Arpoxaïs, the second brother, of those called Katiari and Trasprians; the youngest, who was king, of those called Paralatae.’<sup>20</sup> The third story, to which Herodotus in common with modern scholars gives the greatest credence, is that the Scythians moved from Asia into Europe by way of the great steppe corridor.<sup>21</sup> A generally similar account was given in the first century BC by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, namely that at first the Scythians lived along the Araxes river but later migrated to the foot of the Caucasus and the northern Black Sea region, and ultimately ‘extended their power as far as the Nile in Egypt’.<sup>22</sup>

The question of the origin of the Scythians remains unclear not only because the classical authors differ but also because the Scythians themselves have left few archaeological traces other than the portable material culture typical of nomads. Some of this culture’s prominent elements are certainly of non-European origin: the horse harness, projectile weaponry and zoomorphic designs (primarily felines and herbivores). The sources of the latter ‘Animal Style’, in particular, can be traced back to pre-Scythian and early Scythian Central Asia (this is discussed in Chapter 3).<sup>23</sup>

However, it is clear that during the seventh century BC the Scythians invaded the Near East and fought with the

great states of that region: Assyria, Urartu, Media, Babylonia, Egypt and Lydia. These interventions are attested by a number of precious objects of Near Eastern origin that ended up in Scythian tombs discovered since the eighteenth century: they range from swords and axes to cups, bowls, diadems and jewelry (figs 14–15). These were either taken as ancient war booty or had been specially manufactured for Scythian patrons by eastern craftsmen.<sup>24</sup>

It appears that following this military interlude the Scythians went on living peacefully in the region between the Caucasus and the Danube, and became good neighbours with the Greek colonists who arrived on the northern shore of the Black Sea during the second half of the seventh century BC. The Greeks founded a number of settlements there, such as Borysthenes on the island of Berezan, Olbia at the mouth of the Southern Bug, Panticapaeum and Nymphaeum in Crimea, and a fortress near modern Taganrog whose ancient name remains unknown, although some scholars identify it with the port of Kremnoi, or the so-called ‘Cliffs’ mentioned by Herodotus (fig. 16).<sup>25</sup> Peaceful relations were economically beneficial to Scythians and Greeks alike, and are attested by numerous Greek artefacts found in Scythian burials and settlements. The same probably holds for the eastern Scythians’ contacts with the Achaemenid and Chinese empires.

Persia tried to subdue the Scythians in the late sixth century BC. In 530 BC the Achaemenid ruler Cyrus II (r. c. 550–530 BC) waged war on the Massagetae, but was defeated by their queen Tomyris: ‘There perished the greater part of the Persian army, and there fell Cyrus himself.’<sup>26</sup> The empire of Darius I (r. 522–486 BC) bordered the lands of the *Sakā* nomads who lived on the steppe near the lower Amu darya (ancient river Oxus) in present-day Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. According to his famous inscription at Bisitun in western Iran, Darius took the throne in 522 BC after quelling a number of revolts and taking captive Skunkha, chief of the ‘pointed-hat’ Scythians:

I defeated the *Sakā* utterly; another (part) they took captive, which was led to me in fetters. And (he) who was their chief, called Skunkha – him they took prisoner, led to me in fetters. There I made another their chief, as was my desire. After that, the country became mine.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 16  
Map of the Black Sea region  
showing the main sites, royal burial  
mounds and peoples mentioned  
by Herodotus.

Darius crossed the river Danube into the land of the Scythians in about 513 BC. Despite naval support provided by some tributary Greek city-states, his huge army was forced to retreat. But what prompted this failed military campaign? Herodotus claims, rather implausibly, that Darius wished to punish the Scythians for what they had done during their earlier incursions in the Near East.<sup>28</sup>

Some of Darius' unruly neighbours later joined the Persian army: it was *Sakā* soldiers who initially managed to break the central ranks of the Greeks in the historic battle of Marathon in 490 BC;<sup>29</sup> *Sakā*

horsemen took part in the battle of Plataea in 479 BC<sup>30</sup> and Central Asian nomads continued to fight alongside Persians as late as the time of Alexander the Great.<sup>31</sup> The failed Persian expedition in about 513 BC marked a turning point in the history of that region and, strengthened by a fresh influx of nomads from the east, the Scythians began to exert pressure on local Greek colonies and established a form of protectorate over some of them; some Scythians also migrated west into central Europe and the northern Balkans, and new elements of Greek origin entered Scythian art and material culture as a result of these new contacts.

In about 600 BC, a Scythian royal dynasty emerged and ruled for almost a century.<sup>32</sup> Scythian chieftains are usually called 'kings' as classical Greek writers designated them with the word *basileus*: this should not be assumed to mean that their state organization was at the same level as in Iran, whose rulers were also called *basileus*, but it is clear that hereditary power existed in Scythia during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. In the mid-fifth century:

Scyles was one of the sons born to Ariapithes, king of Scythia; but his mother was of Istria [a Greek colony], and not native-born; and she taught him to speak and read Greek. As time passed, Ariapithes was treacherously slain by Spargapithes, king of the Agathyrsi, and Scyles inherited the kingship and his father's wife, whose name was Opoea, a Scythian woman, and she bore to Scyles a son, Oricus. So Scyles was king of Scythia; but he was in no way content with the Scythian way of life, and was much more inclined to Greek ways, from the bringing up which he had received.<sup>33</sup> ... The Scythians rebelled against him, setting up for their king his brother Octamasades, son of the daughter of Teres. Scyles, learning how they dealt with him and the reason of their so doing, fled into Thrace.<sup>34</sup>

The Thracian king Sitalces handed over Scyles to Octamasades, who had him beheaded.<sup>35</sup> The figural scene on a famous gold comb from the Solokha burial mound, which was made by a Greek artisan in about 400 BC, may illustrate this dramatic internecine struggle (fig. 20).<sup>36</sup> This mound, which originally measured

about 18–19 m high, is the earliest monumental royal tomb in the steppe region north of the Black Sea (fig. 17). It contained two burials, possibly those of Scyles and Octamasades themselves. In addition to the gold comb, the burial mound has yielded other objects that illustrate the cultural contacts between Scythians and Greeks: a gold bowl decorated with animal combat scenes must have changed hands several times before ending up in the tomb, as its two separate Greek inscriptions were almost completely erased in antiquity (fig. 19).

In about 400 BC the Scythians became involved with the Bosphoran Kingdom in the northern Black Sea region, often as its allies. Their political and economic influence grew during the first half of the fourth century, ultimately causing friction with the foremost local power of that period, Macedon. The Scythians and Macedonians were originally on good terms but their overlapping interests in the Balkans soon led to armed conflict. The Scythian tribes were ruled by King Ateas, who also controlled some of the Greek colonies on the west coast of the Black Sea. The Macedonian ruler and father of Alexander the Great, Philip II (382–336 BC), defeated and killed the ninety-year-old Ateas in battle in 339 BC. Interaction with Macedonia, both military and diplomatic, continued, as some sources mention a Scythian embassy to Alexander in 329/328 BC, when he reached Central Asia:

Soon afterwards envoys reached Alexander from the Scythian king; they had been sent to excuse what had occurred, on the ground that it had not been the action of the Scythian community, but only that of raiders and freebooters; the king

Fig. 17  
View of the burial mound Solokha  
in 1912.

Fig. 18  
Mid-nineteenth-century view  
of the Chertomlyk burial mound.  
Watercolour drawing by I. P. Volsky.  
Archive of the Institute for the History  
of Material Culture, St Petersburg





himself was ready to do what was required of him. Alexander gave a kindly answer, since he thought it dishonourable not to press the attack, if he distrusted the king, and not the right moment to press it.<sup>37</sup> ...

Envoys came to Alexander a second time from the European Scythians, together with the envoys he himself had sent to Scythia, for the king of the Scythians at the time when they were being sent by Alexander had died; and his brother was reigning. The purpose of the embassy was to express the readiness of the Scythians to do whatever Alexander commanded; they brought gifts for Alexander from the king of Scythia which are most highly regarded in Scythia, and said that the king was willing to give Alexander his daughter in marriage, to confirm his friendship and alliance. If, however, Alexander should not think fit to marry the Scythian princess, he was still willing to give the daughters of the satraps of the Scythian territory and of the chief personages in Scythia to Alexander's most trusted followers; he would also come to visit Alexander, if summoned, and hear Alexander's commands from Alexander himself ... Alexander then replied to the Scythian envoys graciously and as his interest at the time demanded, that he had no need of a Scythian marriage ... He said that for the time being his own concern was India; for by subduing India he would at once be in possession of Asia as a whole, and with Asia in his possession he would return to Greece, and march thence by Hellespont and Propontis to Pontus with all his naval and land forces.<sup>38</sup>

It is clear from this that Alexander intended to subdue the Scythians at a later date, but the prospect of conquering India and his subsequent premature death at Babylon thwarted this.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most impressive royal burial mounds of the third quarter of the fourth century BC is Chertomlyk (fig. 18), on the right bank of the lower Dnieper, and this has yielded some unusual decorative objects, including gold plaques that once decorated a sheath and a bow case (fig. 21), and a Persian sword. These may have been diplomatic gifts from Alexander and the Bosphoran king Paerisades I.<sup>40</sup>

During the fourth and third centuries BC, nomadic culture flourished across Eurasia. Mighty burial

mounds continued to be built over the burials of Scythian rulers, such as Solokha, Kul' Oba and Pazyryk (fig. 17; see also Chapter 7), and their grave contents demonstrate wealth and wide international contacts. Some of the objects were specially made by Greek, Persian and other foreign craftsmen for Scythian patrons, whereas others were acquired through war, trade or diplomatic exchange. Finds like those from the Pazyryk burial mounds in the Altai region far to the east show that even these distant tribes maintained contact with Achaemenid Iran, as the grave goods include Persian imports as well as locally manufactured objects with strong Persian influence.

In the northern Black Sea region, Scythian political dominance appears to have come to an abrupt end in about 300 BC or shortly thereafter. The reasons remain uncertain. However, the Scythian peoples did not completely disappear, but instead moved to the periphery of the large region that they had previously inhabited. A Scythian cemetery by the river Dniester in the west dates to the third and second centuries BC, and some chieftain burials from Pazyryk date to about 300–250 BC. Moreover, the Huns and Sarmatians who replaced the Scythians in Central Asia during the third and second centuries inherited many elements of their culture. In short, this was a period of transition rather than sudden change. In Crimea during the second century a small Scythian state was formed: here Scythians evidently coexisted with other nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, and the kings bore Scythian names.<sup>41</sup> At approximately the same time, in about 200 BC, a similar state, 'Scythia Minor', emerged south of the Danube delta, and its rulers minted their own coins for about a century.<sup>42</sup> It was only in the third century AD that an invasion by the Germanic Goths finally wiped out the Scythians from the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, even after their final disappearance, echoes of the Scythian 'Animal Style' can be found in medieval art,<sup>43</sup> and some elements of the folk epic and popular lore of present-day European nations have their roots in Scythian antiquity.<sup>44</sup>

Fig. 19  
Gold bowl with central omphalos and decoration showing animal contest scenes. Late fifth to early fourth century BC. Diam. 21.3 cm. Solokha burial mound, Dnieper region. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1913 1-48

Fig. 20  
Gold comb from the Solokha burial mound. Late fifth to early fourth century BC. H. 12.6 cm. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1913 1/1 1

Fig. 21  
Gold overlay for a bow case and quiver. Fourth century BC. L. 46.8, W. 27.3 cm. Chertomlyk, Dnieper region. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1863 1/435





# Herodotus

Herodotus was born about 484 BC in the ancient Greek city of Halicarnassus, modern Bodrum in present-day south-west Turkey. Banished by the city’s ruler Lygdamis, he later moved to the Athenian colony of Thuria in southern Italy, where he wrote his famous prose account of the Persian invasions of Greece in 490 and 480 BC, known as the *Histories* and conventionally divided into nine books. Unsurprisingly, this is pro-Athenian and fits in with judgmental ancient Greek views of foreigners. It is both a literary work and a historical narrative, and combines humorous asides with comparisons of customs and natural phenomena.<sup>45</sup> Herodotus is regarded by many as ‘the father of history’, as his is the earliest written history in western Europe, yet condemned by some modern scholars as ‘the father of lies’; his reliability attracted different opinions as early as the second half of the fifth century BC, when the Greek historian and general Thucydides questioned whether his style of writing was really historical.<sup>46</sup> Although the Greco-Persian Wars form the bulk of the *Histories*, a significant portion of Book Four is devoted to describing and contrasting two regions at the western limits of the Persian Empire: Egypt and the Black Sea, where ‘are to be found, if we except Scythia, the most uncivilized nations in the world’.<sup>47</sup> In the light of the Persian sack of Athens in 480 BC, Herodotus commended the Scythians’ ability to

have managed one thing, and that the most important in human affairs, better than anyone else on the face of the earth: I mean their own preservation. For such is their manner of life that no one who invades their country can escape destruction, and if they wish to avoid engaging with an enemy, that enemy cannot by any possibility come to grips with them.<sup>48</sup>

Independent archaeological evidence confirms many of Herodotus’ observations and suggests that he spent some of his exile here, probably at one of the Greek colonies, where he would have had direct contact with local Scythians and Greek traders.<sup>49</sup> Although it is a traveller’s account, his work is therefore partly ethnographic. The fact that he is vague on details of geography or customs beyond the Black Sea region simply shows the limits of Greek knowledge of the Scythian homelands, but one of the great strengths of Russian archaeology has been to show the roots and extent of the Scythians far to the east, as well as the veracity of many of Herodotus’ descriptions of them. **sus**

# Siberia

Siberia is vast. It stretches over eight time zones and borders Europe, Central Asia, China, the Pacific Ocean and the Arctic Circle. Its land mass exceeds that of either the United States or Europe, and accounts for three quarters of Russian territory. The region covers many environments – tundra, forest and grassy steppe.<sup>50</sup> The tundra extends for over 320 km south of the Arctic shore and is generally cold: average temperatures only rise above –10 degrees Celsius for part of the year, and snow covers the ground for two thirds.<sup>51</sup> According to Herodotus: ‘northward of that country [Scythia] snow falls continually ... the parts to the north of this continent are uninhabited’.<sup>52</sup> The permanently frozen subsoil, or permafrost, prevents drainage, and the ground is swampy and vegetation sparse. Polar bears, whales, walruses and seals are found along the coasts, and reindeer, wolves, foxes, rodents and some bird species live inland, while many migratory birds arrive in spring. The paucity of resources and hardship of the terrain have restricted human occupation, but archaeological research indicates that an Inuit-style economy based on catching marine creatures extended along the eastern Siberian coastline from the first centuries AD.<sup>53</sup>

Further south, the tundra is replaced by evergreen forest that ranges from dense pine, fir and larch conifers (*taiga*) in the north and east to mixed deciduous and coniferous forest in the west, and a zone of temperate deciduous forest stretching from the Urals to western Europe. This central Siberian plateau is bounded to the north, east and south by high mountains: the Sayan and Altai to the south reach up to 4,506 m in height, and are the source of three big river systems belonging to

Fig. 22  
Map of Asia (1:18,000,000) published  
by H. Moll, 1726: Siberia dominates  
the upper half.  
Royal Geographical Society, 532606



the Ob, Yenisei and Lena. Herodotus remarks on how the country ‘has rivers by far the greatest and the most numerous in the world’,<sup>54</sup> and this is a striking feature of the earliest maps of the region (fig. 22). The forest is rich in timber, berries and edible fungi, and is home to reindeer, deer, bears, tigers and wolves, as well as foxes, sables, polecats, weasels, ermines, mink, martens and squirrels; it developed after the last Ice Age, but the soils are thin and poor. It sustained herders, hunter-gatherers and fishermen until it attracted loggers, miners and settlers in the seventeenth century. An estimated 36 million people were sent there between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, either for incarceration in penal colonies, internal exile or resettlement in order to exploit the region’s resources.<sup>55</sup> They brought new diseases and the local populations suffered heavily: the current population numbers some 32 million, but only 1.5 million are classed as native, and 26 of the ethnic groups were classified in the official census of 1989 as ‘ultra minorities ... doomed to certain extinction’, as some only number a few hundred or fewer.<sup>56</sup>

To the south the region turns to steppe, which forms a long and almost continuous grassy corridor stretching from Mongolia to Hungary (fig. 23). Although the soils are humus-rich they were not used for agriculture until the nineteenth century. Instead, this zone is perfectly suited for hunting or herding. As Herodotus describes it: ‘their country is level and grassy and well watered and rivers run through it’.<sup>57</sup> It was in this vast open homeland of Inner Asia that the Scythians and their successors developed a distinctive economy and lifestyle based on pastoral nomadism (fig. 24). Beyond lie the arid steppes of western Central Asia and the sandy Taklamakan desert of southern Xinjiang, whereas west it gives way to the forested interface with the Caucasus mountains and the Black Sea. These regions mark a zone of interaction, trade and tension between people enjoying a lifestyle dominated by pastoral nomadism and those for whom agriculture and permanent settlement were the norm. **sus**



Fig. 23  
View of the Eurasian steppe as it begins in Mongolia.

Fig. 24  
Postcard showing a Kazakh horseman in the Altai region in about 1910. British Museum, London, EPH-ME 7768

Fig. 25  
Postcard dated 6 August 1914 showing the Trans-Siberian Railway as it passes along the shore of Lake Baikal. The postcard was produced by the Swedish publisher Granberg, which was one of the first publishers to flood the Russian postcard market. British Museum, London, EPH-ME 7764



## The Trans-Siberian Railway

On 31 May 1891 Tsar Nicholas inaugurated a project to connect both sides of Russia physically by means of a railway line, which was to cover 5,900 miles between St Petersburg and Vladivostok, and on 16 August 1898 the first train arrived at Irkutsk, ‘the Paris of Siberia’.<sup>58</sup> The building of the Trans-Siberian Railway, known simply in Russia as the ‘Great Siberian’, was marked by severe hardship and unexpected setbacks, but the line proved a powerful symbol of modern Russian achievement. Its construction involved about 66,000 men, and the main portion took twelve years to lay (fig. 25). The two last hurdles were Lake Baikal, the largest inland source of fresh water in the world, and a section near the Chinese border then in Manchuria. In 1900 British engineers were contracted to assemble an imported ice-breaking train ferry on the shores of the lake, and the inaugural voyage took place that year. The line north of China was finally opened in 1916, and Nicholas’s dream was fulfilled. The completion of this massive engineering scheme was celebrated in a huge panorama by the Russian watercolourist Pavel Yakovlevich Pyasetsky (1843–1921), who spent each summer between 1894 and 1899 recording the construction, and then combined his paintings on nine great rolls, which are over 850 m long in total.<sup>59</sup> **sus**



E. F. Korolkova

## 2 The Siberian Collection of Peter the Great





# The Siberian Collection of Peter the Great

E. F. Korolkova

The ancient gold and silver things, which are found in the earth of ancient tombs, people of any office are to declare and present in Tobolsk, and those things to be taken from them for the Treasury of the Great Tsar, and money to be given out from the Treasury for the things taken.'

The Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (cat. 1) is the earliest archaeological collection of any kind in Russia. It contains around 240 gold artefacts from the ancient Scythian and Sarmatian nomadic cultures of Eurasia. This unique collection of pairs of symmetrical buckles, torcs, bracelets and other items of personal adornment provides an important source for understanding Scythian and Sarmatian culture. Although the collection owes its origins to Peter's direct involvement, its current title did not emerge until the second half of the nineteenth century and was not in general use until the second half of the twentieth century. The end of the nineteenth century saw the collection grow with the addition of several other artefacts, which, though they do not relate to the times of Peter the Great, historically speaking fit rather well with the rest of the objects. The lack of any precise data on their find-spots, owing to their discovery through tomb robbing rather than archaeological excavation, the gradual accumulation of objects and frequent museum transfers, adds to the complexity of this story. The history of the Siberian Collection and the origin of its objects are obscure. The records of all the Siberian finds, including documentation of their origins, the time and place of their discovery, and Treasury invoices, were originally kept in the Tobolsk archive in southern Siberia, but this burned to the ground in 1788. The Siberian Collection had been in Peter's private possession and was kept in his Summer

Palace (cat. 2) until his death in 1725. It remained in the royal collection until the death of his second wife and successor Catherine I (1684–1727), after which an inventory was made by the senior court clerk, P. I. Moshkov, and on 22 December 1727 the collection was transferred from the care of the court to the Academy of Sciences and placed in the Kunstkamera (see below).<sup>2</sup> For a long time, this inventory was the only documentation to throw any light on the origins of the collection. In the 1730s a unique catalogue with watercolour drawings of the artefacts was created by the students of fine art and printmaking in the Engraving Workshop of the Academy of Sciences, and the work to create the so-called 'Paper Museum' was finished in the early 1740s;<sup>3</sup> fortunately, many of these illustrations still survive, and in 1894 six volumes of drawings, along with some of the archaeological finds, were transferred from the Imperial Academy of Sciences' Archaeology Museum to the Hermitage. In 1747 a fire in the Kunstkamera destroyed many artefacts and the records of the collection were jumbled up. In 1859, by order of Alexander II (1818–1881), the Siberian Collection was removed from the Kunstkamera and taken to the Hermitage, but this transfer took place gradually, over several decades, which added to the already substantial confusion over the provenance and association of the objects.

The ancient jewelry in the Siberian Collection was looted from burial mounds during the early eighteenth century. The people responsible were, in a sense, pioneers in exploring the vastness of Siberia. Escaped convicts, Swedes taken captive after their defeat at the battle of Poltava in 1709, monks from the Urals, miners and explorers were the first to leave their mark along the Siberian rivers and *taiga*. Some returned with great riches, but the severe Siberian climate and

physical hardships and dangers exacted a high price, and many lives were lost. These people, who were completely ignorant of the ancient cultures of Siberia, nevertheless developed the first appreciation of this new territory and created the earliest maps of it. Although they inadvertently destroyed much scientific evidence, they also left a large legacy of unique objects, which now form the basis of the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great.

This collection remains one of the most valuable sources for research on the history of the Eurasian nomadic peoples, and provides clues to their material and spiritual cultures. At the same time it is a monument to Russian culture of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. This achievement is in no small part the direct result of the dynamic personality of Peter the Great and his restless curiosity and wide fields of interest.

The first quarter of the eighteenth century saw Russia dramatically expand its territories into an empire. Peter's reign became known as a time of drastic change and reform that affected all areas of life, from the running of government to daily life. This not only changed the national economy and way of life but also affected personal outlooks. This in turn led to greater interest in the geography and history of the many peoples populating the different regions of the Russian state, including Siberia and Central Asia. It also had a practical aspect, as new trade routes and the development of natural resources offered new opportunities for Russia. It was with this in mind that the nineteenth-century Russian historian Solov'ev wrote:

Peter, attempting to achieve his 'grand goal' – gaining access to the Baltic Sea – had been closely watching the east, fully aware of its significance for his country. He knew that Russia's economic well-being would rise substantially were it to become a trade hub, connecting Europe with Asia ... All the countries of the east, from China to Turkey, were of great interest to him.<sup>4</sup>

Exploring Siberia became a primary line of enquiry in Russian geopolitical expansion, and the flourishing of the sciences and humanities was a direct reflection of this new state of affairs. Peter's passion for learning widened his world view and fuelled his infatuation

with collecting, which was not uncommon among the enlightened European rulers of the time. However, far from being a simple private collector, Peter laid the foundations of museum practice, and his collections of geological, zoological, anatomical, ethnographic and archaeological specimens became the core of the collection of the first Russian museum. This was founded on his initiative in 1714 and was called the Kunstkamera or 'Cabinet of Curiosities' (cats 5–7). The Siberian artefacts were also useful to Peter as part of his plan to compile a complete history of Russia and its ancient population. It is worth remarking that it was examples of 'grave gold' and the process of amassing the collection that stimulated Peter's interest and prompted him to commission the first Russian archaeological excavations. These made use of invited European experts and were aimed solely at research, marking the birth of Russian archaeology.

'Hillocks' or 'Tatar graves' were the names then given to the burial mounds of ancient nomadic peoples. The surviving burials of tribal chiefs, whose shrines contained valuable gold artefacts, became a source of substantial gains for some. Military commanders from Tomsk and Krasnoyarsk led whole squads of diggers who often returned with considerable booty. These expeditions had a dual purpose. The first was to explore Siberia, draw maps and identify sources of gold ore, circumstantial evidence of which came in the form of the countless gold grave goods that indicated a well-established local gold industry; this was a task of national importance. The second was to participate in raids on the burial mounds and shrines; these held the promise of immense personal gain. Gangs of diggers, sometimes up to 300 strong, worked seasonally and excavated burials from spring to autumn each year.

The core of the Siberian Collection was formed between 1715 and 1718, although it is possible that the Tsar had his eye on some objects even earlier. This is confirmed by a reference to matching objects from the same burials in the possession of another collector of Siberian objects, the Dutchman Nicolaas Witsen (see below). By one account, a considerable portion of objects from Peter's collection arrived in St Petersburg as a gift from an industrialist from the Urals, one Demidov, on the birth of Tsarevich Peter Petrovich in 1715, and led some to call the entire group 'the Demidov collection'. No written records survive to

prove this gift was in fact made, although it most likely was. This version of events relies on I. I. Golikov’s multi-volume opus on the life of Peter the Great published in 1789.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately this work says nothing about the number of objects presented, nor is there any description of them; the definite identification of any particular artefact is therefore impossible. Golikov does not even mention Demidov’s initials: some researchers believe that it was Nikita Demidov; others, that it was his son, Akinfiy.

After recognizing the artistic and historic value of the objects, Peter passed several decrees aimed at stopping the looting of Siberian burials. These were the first to have at their core the intention of safeguarding sites of cultural heritage. His direct decrees have not survived, but there are official letters referring to them as early as 1717/18. Apart from the decree on the compulsory transfer of all finds to St Petersburg and their deposition in the Treasury, Peter’s decrees also contained clauses on the punishment of looters, ordering the execution of grave robbers. Aiming not only to preserve objects but also to record as much scientifically valuable information about them as possible, the Tsar demanded ‘field drawings to be made of everything which is discovered’.<sup>6</sup>

Peter wanted to change the character of excavations conducted in Siberia and he invited a German scholar, Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685–1735), to Russia. In 1718 Messerschmidt was contracted to lead an expedition to Siberia with the aim of obtaining ‘its physical description’ and ‘seeking various rarities’. He noted that by the time he arrived in Siberia, all of the large burial mounds had already been looted, but in 1722 he directed excavations at several burial sites together with Philippe Johann Tabbert (1676–1747), a Swede captured at Poltava who was later granted noble status and the name Stralenberg. There was nothing of monetary value in one burial excavated near Abakhan Ostrog, but in order to record the ancient burial techniques Messerschmidt drew a sketch of this burial mound, and this constitutes the first Russian archaeological excavation that had a scientific purpose.

In accordance with Peter’s orders, the governor of Siberia, Prince Matvey Petrovich Gagarin (c. 1659–1721), bought the most interesting finds on his behalf and became his chief supplier of Siberian ‘grave gold’. One of his main tasks was to collect information

on any available sources of gold and send regular updates to St Petersburg. He was diligent in investigating the trail of the finders, and pleaded with, intimidated and bargained with them for the most interesting objects. He also mounted his own expeditions, as there is a reference to one in 1716 where he sent people from Siberia ‘to the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, to the land of Samarqand’, in search of treasure reportedly discovered there.

On 5 July 1717 Gagarin ordered that the Tyumen commandant, Colonel Voronetsky, acquire and transfer to the Treasury the ‘ancient gold and silver objects, found in the earth’; there is also a reference to the ‘personal decree of His Majesty, which has been written by the very hand of His Majesty’. A decree was made that all finds of precious metal should be sent to the Treasury of the Great Tsar, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter.<sup>7</sup> We can see that by this year both state and Treasury had a clear interest in archaeological finds. A decree of 13 February 1718 mandated collecting all that was ‘verily ancient and peculiar’. A further decree of 1721 stated: ‘Objects of curiosity which are situated in Siberia are to be bought by the governor of Siberia, or any person appropriate, for their actual price, and then unmolten to be sent over to Berg and the Collegium of Manufacturing.’<sup>8</sup> The Dalmat Monastery of the Dormition in the Urals region in Perm province holds records of the Gagarin order, according to which in 1712 Prince Meschersky, with the help of people from the monastery, sent troops ‘for the gain ... of gold, silver, copper and other things deep in the burial mounds for the tsar’s Treasury’.<sup>9</sup>

The bulk of the looted objects were found in the area around Tobolsk, then capital of Siberia, and were sent to St Petersburg in three consignments. The first shipment, sent before January 1716, only contained a few objects, including a pair of massive symmetrical belt buckles with a scene of a tiger wrestling a fantastic horned beast, four belt buckles with a monster shape, a pair of earrings with suspended human teeth (fig. 26) and another pair of earrings. The second package was sent from Tobolsk on 12 December 1716: it included as many as 122 objects and was the most prized addition to Peter’s collection. According to the inventory, which included ‘all fifty-six items’, the last on the list were

Fig. 26  
Pair of gold earrings mounted with  
human teeth. L. 6.8 cm. Siberian  
Collection of Peter the Great.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Si 1727-1/183

‘small gold objects, 20 pieces, sent to the Great Prince Peter Petrovich, which were found alongside all the above-mentioned objects’. The third shipment consisted of around sixty gold and two silver pieces; the accompanying letter is dated 28 October 1717.

Gagarin, a wealthy nobleman, held his appointment as the governor of Siberia until 1719. He met a sorry end after he was caught embezzling Treasury funds, taking bribes for allowing the sale of beer and wine, and overtaxing merchants travelling from China to Moscow. Thinking himself untouchable, Gagarin had pocketed three diamond rings and an encrusted diamond that had been reserved for Catherine I. He admitted his guilt but was sentenced to be hanged in front of the Courts of Justice building in July 1721, watched by Peter, high-ranking clergy and his own relatives. A courtier, F. V. Bergholtz, reported seeing his dead body hanging from a different noose in public view, and in a diary entry Bergholtz refers to how ‘the body of that Prince Gagarin for better intimidation will be hanged a third time on the other side of the river, and then sent out to Siberia, where it will be allowed to rot hanging from a noose’.<sup>10</sup> No portrait of Gagarin survives, and all his possessions were confiscated, along with those of his family and his wife’s and daughter-in-law’s dowries.

The consignments sent by Gagarin were the most reliable part and main source of the development of the Siberian Collection, and only a few objects followed later. In 1720 Gagarin’s successor, Governor Prince A. M. Cherkassky (1680–1742), asked the senate if he ought to continue buying gold finds.<sup>11</sup> This was agreed and in 1721 a few more objects were delivered to Tobolsk, some of which can be positively identified.

The find-spots and circumstances of the discovery of most of the artefacts in Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection have still not been fully determined. Some similar objects have been discovered more recently, and these help to date and identify them. It is possible that a large portion of the collection comes from sites in or near the Altai steppe and was found in the territory between the rivers Ob and Irtysh, but some may have been found elsewhere too, as the Tobolsk diggers, moving along the river valleys in search of burial mounds containing ancient gold, went up the Iset river, crossed the Ural mountains, and reached as far as Tchusova and Ufa. Modern archaeological studies support an Altai origin of some of the objects in the



Siberian Collection, as a recent expedition directed by K. V. Chugunov to burial mound 1 at Bugry revealed traces of late eighteenth-century cultivation in the vicinity, and even a shovel left behind by the diggers.

To appreciate the origins of the objects in Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection, it is useful to compare it with another collection, now unfortunately lost. This belonged to Nicolaas Witsen (1641–1717), a Dutch scholar and collector who was burgomaster of Amsterdam (fig. 27). Peter was personally acquainted with him and held him in high regard as an authority; indeed, Peter’s idea of starting a collection of ancient artefacts would not have happened without Witsen’s influence. The Dutchman was the first to show scientific interest in ancient Siberian artefacts, and, having grasped their artistic and historical significance, began to collect them. After finishing his degree as a young man, he went to Moscow in 1664 as part of the Dutch embassy, but never travelled to Siberia. He made some acquaintances in Russia, however, and corresponded with them after he left the country. Over the next twenty-eight years this scholar amassed material for a book entitled *Northern and Eastern Tartary*, which went through three editions in 1692, 1705 and 1785.<sup>12</sup> With the help of his Russian agents, Witsen bought valuable finds discovered in





ancient burials, and noted the disparity between the abject poverty of the uneducated local population of Siberia and the abundance of precious artefacts that showed a highly developed ancient artistic culture. In a letter to the burgomaster of Deventer, Gisbert Cuper (1644–1716), dated 18 September 1714, Witsen wrote: ‘What must they have been like, the civilized people who buried these treasures! ... The finish on the gold is so masterful and clever, that I would doubt a European could do better.’<sup>13</sup> Other letters from that year hint at concerns over the growing amount of looting and trafficking of antiquities, and in one dated 1 June 1714 we read that gold objects dispatched to him from Tobolsk were intercepted and sold to someone else.

Witsen’s written legacy enables us to narrow the period of his collecting to 1703–1716. However, there are reasons to believe that he began collecting even earlier. The packages he received in Russia in 1714 and 1717 contained about forty artefacts, including torcs and belt buckles with zoomorphic images. Hand-drawn object lists of these still survive and were published in Amsterdam in 1785: the images show ornaments not unlike those in the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (figs 28–29). In some cases these objects form a pair with ones from Peter’s

collection. One such is the pair of belt buckles with a monster fighting a snake: one is in the Siberian Collection, the other was in the possession of Witsen (figs 28 and 30). The same goes for a pair of pendants. These were undoubtedly excavated from the same burial and divided between collectors in the early eighteenth century. The date Witsen acquired the buckle plate is confirmed in his letter to Cuper dated 18 September 1714, and from this it follows that its pair must have reached Peter, via a person unknown, around the same date. This unidentified person may have been Demidov. After Witsen’s death in 1717, Peter made an unsuccessful attempt to purchase the collection from his widow, but the objects were auctioned in Amsterdam in 1728 and their subsequent fate is unknown.

The question of where the objects in this collection were made is almost as mysterious as their find-spots. We can certainly assume that some of these precious ornaments may have been transported far from their place of manufacture by ancient nomadic peoples. The origin of some might be found in the eastern or peripheral regions of the Persian Empire of Achaemenid Iran, but we should not discount the possibility that others were produced by nomads themselves in a style that was heavily influenced by

Fig. 27  
Portrait of Nicolaas Witsen.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, ERG 12812

Fig. 28–29  
Pages from Witsen’s book showing  
illustrations of the now-unlocated  
objects in his Siberian collection.  
The National Russian Library

Fig. 30  
Belt plaque depicting snake and  
monster with boar’s head. Gold,  
turquoise, smalt. L. 14, H 8.5 cm.  
Third to second century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/150

Fig. 31  
Gold torc with coloured inlays. Gold,  
inlays. Diam. 16.5 cm. Fifth century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Z-568

the Achaemenids. It is worth noting that, from as early as the beginning of the fifth century BC, contact with the Achaemenid Empire brought a marked change in the zoomorphic designs of Eurasian nomads, and similarity to styles of Achaemenid art does not necessarily denote imports. Moreover, a large number of the Altai sites dating from the fifth to third centuries BC have yielded wooden, leather and felt objects of unequivocally local origins but which directly parallel the art of the ancient Near East. The Altai sites of the Scythian period, especially the first and second Pazyryk burial mounds, frequently contain representations of horned lion-griffins, which are also commonly found on Achaemenid architectural decoration as well as portable material culture.<sup>14</sup> A similar image appears on one of the gold torcs of the Siberian Collection (fig. 31), which seems to bear the closest resemblance to the ornaments from the Oxus Treasure (see Chapter 8), and a pair of Siberian belt-buckle plates in Peter’s collection carry another such image.

In the absence of any clear evidence for the location and circumstances of discovery of the Siberian Collection, their main importance lies in their undisputed authenticity. Unlike the late nineteenth century and more recent periods, the early eighteenth century had not yet seen the development of forgery, and the Siberian Collection can thus be seen as setting a benchmark of comparison for other unprovenanced objects. Among the zoomorphic objects are several distinct jewelry groups that relate to different chronological periods and cultural zones, although all are within the wider Eurasian nomadic phenomenon;

some are more Achaemenid in style and were undoubtedly produced under strong Iranian influence somewhere on the periphery of the Persian Empire. The polychrome inlaid jewelry, judging by the manufacturing technique, was imported, as it is typical of the Achaemenid and later periods of the ancient Near East, and there are clear iconographic and stylistic links between the Oxus Treasure and the Altai artefacts in Peter’s Siberian Collection. Another group pertains to Central Asia and echoes the zoomorphic style of the Altai Pazyryk burial mounds and later Sarmatian artefacts. Finally, other objects, such as belt buckles representing dragons, show similarities with Chinese art and illustrate the eastern connections of ancient Siberian peoples.

Almost every object in Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection offers its own academic challenge. Researchers have often noted clear parallels between belt buckles in Peter’s collection and finds from inner Mongolia and Ordos (figs 32–33).<sup>15</sup> The majority of the Central Asian belt plaques were bronze, not gold, and must be of a later stylistic stage compared with the Siberian examples, yet there is still a close connection between the two. With fourteen pairs of different, mainly zoomorphic, buckles, Peter’s collection remains the single largest group of gold belt ornaments. The different pieces were made over a long period between the seventh century BC and the first centuries AD. The collection includes nearly every type of belt buckle, torc and bracelet, style of decoration and variation of iconography, as well as examples of almost every type of manufacture: as discussed below by R. S. Minasyan, these help to connect the objects



with particular sites and technological traditions. Some recently excavated finds also offer close parallels to pieces in this collection, and finally enable their closer dating and cultural interpretation. The closest parallel for the solid ridged torc from Peter's collection (fig. 34) comes from recent excavations at Arzhan-2, which suggests that the torc from Peter's collection can also be dated to the seventh century BC. There is only one other object in the collection that can be stylistically dated to a similarly early date, namely the curled panther buckle (cat. 16). As both were part of Gagarin's second package, they may even have been found together.

In ancient times grave gold served as an indicator of the social status and pedigree of the deceased, rather than necessarily his or her wealth. The precious metal also had sacred connotations, as Scythians and related Indo-Iranian peoples associated gold with the solar cult and considered it a royal metal. In ancient Iranian culture, just as among the Iranian-speaking Eurasian nomads of the Scythian and Sarmatian periods, gold torcs and bracelets were ascribed an apotropaic, or protective, function and served as markers of high status. Belt buckles, torcs and armlets from the Siberian Collection allow a clearer picture of the evolution of these items of personal adornment. Changes in their styles allow comparison with finds from many other sites. Jewelry from the collection, along with these other objects, enables us to trace the development of the style and technology from the Scythian to the Sarmatian periods. It also serves to fill some of the gaps in our understanding of the evolution and interconnection of Eurasian nomadic cultures. Despite the lack of reliable data on the origins of the objects, and the loss of their archaeological context, this unique collection remains an invaluable source for the continuing study of the spiritual and material cultures of the ancient Eurasian nomads, their world view, and their technologies and customs.

**OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT**  
Fig. 32  
Gold belt plaque from Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/13

**OPPOSITE, BOTTOM**  
Fig. 33  
Cast bronze belt buckles of  
Ordos type.  
British Museum, London,  
1916,0803.1-2  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus  
Wollaston Franks

**OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT**  
Fig. 34  
Plain gold torc from Peter the Great's  
Siberian Collection. Diam. 21.6 cm.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/64





# St Petersburg

St Petersburg lies on the edge of the Gulf of Finland and was the brainchild of Peter the Great. It combined his desire to break away from the traditions of Moscow with the development of a European city and a naval base to challenge the Swedish dominance of the Baltic. His new Peter and Paul Fortress was founded on the 'Isle of Birches' in the marshy delta of the river Neva (fig. 35). Construction began with the laying of the first stone on 16 May 1703, and Peter is said to have taken a soldier's bayonet to cut the first two sods of earth and lay them in the form of a cross, uttering the words 'Here shall be a town!' His own first royal residence was a log cabin, which his military carpenters erected in three days, combining a traditional Russian hut with a Dutch-style roof and windows (fig. 36). A wooden shanty town grew up as an imported labour force began driving thousands of piles in advance of construction. On 27 June 1709 the Swedes were defeated at the battle of Poltava, and that night Peter wrote, 'Now indeed we can lay the foundation of St Petersburg.' Peter's fortress was only completed in 1732 with the assistance of 20,000 workmen, including many Swedish prisoners, but during the intervening years the Italian architect Domenico Trezzini (known locally as Andrei Petrovich Tresini) oversaw the implementation of an urban master plan for the city in his capacity as master of building, construction and fortification. The challenges were huge: the Neva regularly flooded, fire was a constant risk as all the buildings were wooden and in 1715 a woman was eaten by a wolf in broad daylight – yet in 1710 the Tsar's family and government moved from Moscow and in 1712 St Petersburg was declared the capital.<sup>16</sup> sus



Fig. 35  
View of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Fig. 36  
Peter the Great's first residence in St Petersburg, built in 1702. Following fires and restoration it was transferred to the Peter and Paul Fortress, then was moved in 1877 to Arkhangelsk and finally dismantled and reassembled at Kolomenskoye, where it is part of the Moscow State Integrated Museum.



1  
**Portrait of Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia (1672–1725)**

This portrait was painted in 1698 when, between 10 or 11 January and 21 April, Peter the Great was in London visiting William III, whom he greatly admired. This was part of his famous 'grand embassy' of 1697/8, a diplomatic mission that turned into a fact-finding tour of the more advanced countries of western Europe. Peter was especially interested in the ship-building of the Dutch and English, having begun the construction of a Russian navy in 1695, and a mock naval battle was specially put on for his benefit at Portsmouth on 22 March. He is shown wearing armour with an ermine-lined cloak embroidered with the imperial arms and holding a baton in his right hand, with his crown and sceptre behind him. Ships can be seen at manoeuvres through a window behind, but it is unclear whether this was an allusion to the sea battle he watched or to the *Royal Transport*, the yacht presented to him by William III and which he had sailed to England. This portrait was painted for William III by Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), who had studied with Rembrandt in Amsterdam and by 1676 was working in England as a fashionable portrait painter: within two years it had already been hung in the Drawing Room at Kensington, and a copy hangs in the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. Kneller went on to paint seven British monarchs (Charles II, James II, William III, Mary II, Anne, George I and George II).<sup>17</sup> sus

Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), signed and dated: *Petrus Alexeewitz. Magnus Dominus. / Tzar Et Magnus Dux Moscoviae / Jussu Britanniae Majestatis Godefridus Kneller Eques / ad vivum Pinxit, 1698*  
Oil on canvas  
H. 256.5, W. 163.8 cm; 8.0 cm frame, external  
Royal Collection, RCIN 405645





2

### View of the Summer Palace of Peter I

This page is from a series of eleven 'lesser' etchings with views of St Petersburg, which completed a *Panorama of St Petersburg* by A. F. Zubov. The foreground shows the Neva embankment, with the Summer Palace of Peter the Great on the left. This palace was built between 1710 and 1712 by the architect Domenico Trezzini, who was born near Lugano in about 1670 and died in St Petersburg in 1734. The bas-reliefs are credited to the German sculptor Andreas Schlüter, who was born in Danzig in 1659/60 and also died in St Petersburg in 1714. In the background we see the landscape of a symmetrical ('French') garden with parterres, pavilions and fountains. **VL**

Aleksei Fedorovich Zubov (1682/83–1751)  
Engraving workshop of the St Petersburg Printing House, St Petersburg, 1716/17  
Paper; etching, burin engraving  
From the principal collection of the Hermitage Academic Library  
Top centre, in the ribbon: 'Summer Palace'  
Bottom right-hand corner: 'Ale.Zub'  
H. 16.9, W. 20.5 cm (page cropped)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 17135



3

### View of the Second Winter Palace

While allocating plots of land along the river Neva for various construction projects, the Tsar personally chose the area between the river and Millionnaya Street, the plot currently occupied by the Hermitage Theatre. In 1708 a small two-storey wooden 'winter house' was built here with a high porch and a tiled roof. In 1711/12 the governor of St Petersburg, Aleksandr Menshikov, ordered the construction of a stone palace on this spot, and this was executed by the architect Trezzini. It was named 'The Bridal House', as it was completed to coincide with the wedding of Peter and Catherine in 1712. **VL**

Aleksei Fedorovich Zubov (1682/83–1751)  
Engraving workshop of the St Petersburg Printing House, St Petersburg 1716/17  
Paper; etching, burin engraving  
From the principal collection of the Hermitage Academic Library  
Top, over the ribbon: 'Winter Palace'  
H. 16.5, W. 20 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 17136



**Panorama of the Neva embankment from the Summer Garden to St Isaac's Church**

Bottom left, in the cartouche: 'View of the Admiralty from the river'. To the left and right of the cartouche are the descriptions of the numbers on the main image: '1. Church of St Isaac of Dalmatia. 2. Admiralty smithy. 3. Carpenter's hut. 4. Admiralty steeple. 5. Shops.'

Bottom centre, in the cartouche: 'View of the City Council with the following chambers.' To the left and right of the cartouche are the descriptions of the numbers on the main image: '1. Court Council. 2. Chambers of Privy Councillor Musin-Pushkin. 3. His Illustrious Highness Prince Kantemir's. 4. The entrance of His Imperial Majesty.'

Bottom right, in the cartouche: 'List of the chambers of the Grand Admiral with the following:' To the left and right of the cartouche are the descriptions of

the numbers on the main image: '1. Chambers of General Admiral Prince Apraksin. 2. Privy Councillor Sava Vladislavovich's. 3. General Yagushinsky's. 4. General Lieutenant Chernyshev's. 5. Admiral Kreis's. 6. Chief Chamberlain Alsuf'ev's. 7. Winter House of His Imperial Majesty. 8. Part of the Court Council.'

In the foreground of each panel we see the river busy with ships; behind is the Neva embankment, the built-up Admiralty Island.

Bottom left: Summer Garden, palace of Prince A. D. Kantemir (1721, architect Rastrelli), and buildings from the 1710s–20s, among which is the City Council. Bottom centre: Winter Palace of Peter the Great (1716–19, architect Mattarnovi; rebuilt in 1720–27, architect Trezzini); houses of Admiral C. Kreis, General P. Yaguzhinsky and Prince S. Raguzhinsky; palace of Admiral F. Apraksin (1716–23, architect Le Blond). Bottom right: the Admiralty (founded in 1704) and the Church of St Isaac of Dalmatia

(1717–19, architect Mattarnovi; rebuilt in 1719, architects Gerbel and Chiaveri, and in 1727, architect Zemtsov).

These pages are from *The Chambers of the Saint Petersburg Imperial Academy of Sciences' Library and Kunstkamera, with a Brief Description of the Artefacts and Objects of Natural History Contained in Them, Composed for the Benefit of Such Persons as Will Find Them of Interest* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1741). The publication includes twelve etchings depicting the facades, plans, sections and interiors of the building of the Academy of Sciences and its Kunstkamera, produced in the late 1730s–40s from the drawings of the architect Schumacher, by engravers A. Polyakov, C. Wortman, I. Sokolov, G. Kachalov and F. Mattarnovi. 'A projection view of the Library of the second and third apartments' (table 12) etched from the drawing by Girolamo Bona, frontispiece – from the drawings of Bartolomeo Tarsia. The etchings in this volume provide the only existing detailed evidence of the interior design of the building which housed the

Academy of Sciences, Library and Kunstkamera prior to the fire of 1747. The etchings are preceded in the book by the description by I. D. Schumacher of the 'Imperial Academy of Sciences with all which in it belongs', which consisted of a 'short explanation of the state of the Academy of Sciences, as well as the Library and the Kunstkamera', a list of its presidents, counsellors, professors, honorary members, aides, students, Library and Kunstkamera staff, publishers and so on. **VL**

Elliger Ottmar III (1703–1735)  
From a drawing by C. Marselius, 1725; Engraving Chamber of the Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, 1728/29  
Paper; etched with burin and acid (on three pages)  
From the principal collection of the Hermitage Academic Library  
Three sheets; H. 51.8, W. 210 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 17137–17139







5  
**The east facade of the Imperial Library and Kunstkamera**

Bottom section of the page, in four columns, the first in Russian: 'Facade of the building housing the Imperial Library and Kunstkamera to the East. / Aufriss von der Kayserlichen Bibliothec, und Kunstkammer, gegen Morgen. / Façade de la Bibliotheque & des Sales des raretés, vers l'orient. / Orthographia externa adium, quibus Bibliotheca, et Gazophylacium rerum naturalium et artificiosarum continentur, Ortum versus.'

Signed in the bottom right-hand corner: 'Gryd: Grig: Kachalov.' Grigory Anikeyevich Kachalov (1711/12–1759) was a Russian engraver, landscape and portrait artist, and illustrator. From 1728 he was a student of O. Elliger and C. A. Wortmann at the College of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. He became a master craftsman in the 1750s and director of the Engraving Chamber of the Academy of Sciences in 1757.

The Kunstkamera, commissioned by Peter the Great, was purpose-built to house the Academy of Sciences and was the very first Russian museum. The initial design was by the architect G. Mattarnovi, who led the construction in 1718/19. After his death in 1719 the work was taken up by N. Gerbel, who made a number of changes to the project. Construction proved slow and was marked by long periods of inactivity. By the time of Peter's death in 1725, only the walls were completed. In 1724 G. Chiaveri took charge of finishing the construction and, instead of a humble balustrade, his new design saw the embankment-facing facade fitted with an elaborate baroque pediment composed of ornate, academically themed sculpture. Heeding the demand of the renowned astronomer N. G. De Lille, the top of the tower was extended upwards. The building was completed by M. Zemtsov, who in 1734 topped the Kunstkamera tower with the armillary sphere. In 1726 the still-unfinished building received the first collections to be housed in the east wing. The round hall on the ground floor was intended for

the Anatomy Theatre, the third floor housed 'the Famous Gottorp Globe', which the Academy received on the orders of the State Senate of 30 September 1725, and the tower was equipped to house the observatory. The building was substantially damaged in the fire of 1747 but was restored by S. I. Chevakinsky. **VL**

Grigory Anikeyevich Kachalov (1711/12–1759) Engraving Chamber of the Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, 1741  
Paper; etching with burin and acid  
From the principal collection of the Hermitage Academic Library  
Top right-hand corner: 'Tab. VI'  
Centre, below the image: a scale with the English foot as the unit of measurement  
H. 46.5, W. 62.5 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 17141



6  
**Kunstkamera: cross section with the central tower and museum galleries to the left and Library to the right**

Bottom section of the page, in four columns, the first in Russian: 'Side view of the Library and the Kunstkamera to the east. / Durchschnitt von der Kayserlichen Bibliothec, und Kunstkammer, gegen Morgen. / Coupe de la Bibliotheque & des Sales des raretés, vers l'Orient. / Orthographia interna Bibliotheca, & Gazophylacii rer: nat: et artificios Ortum versus.'

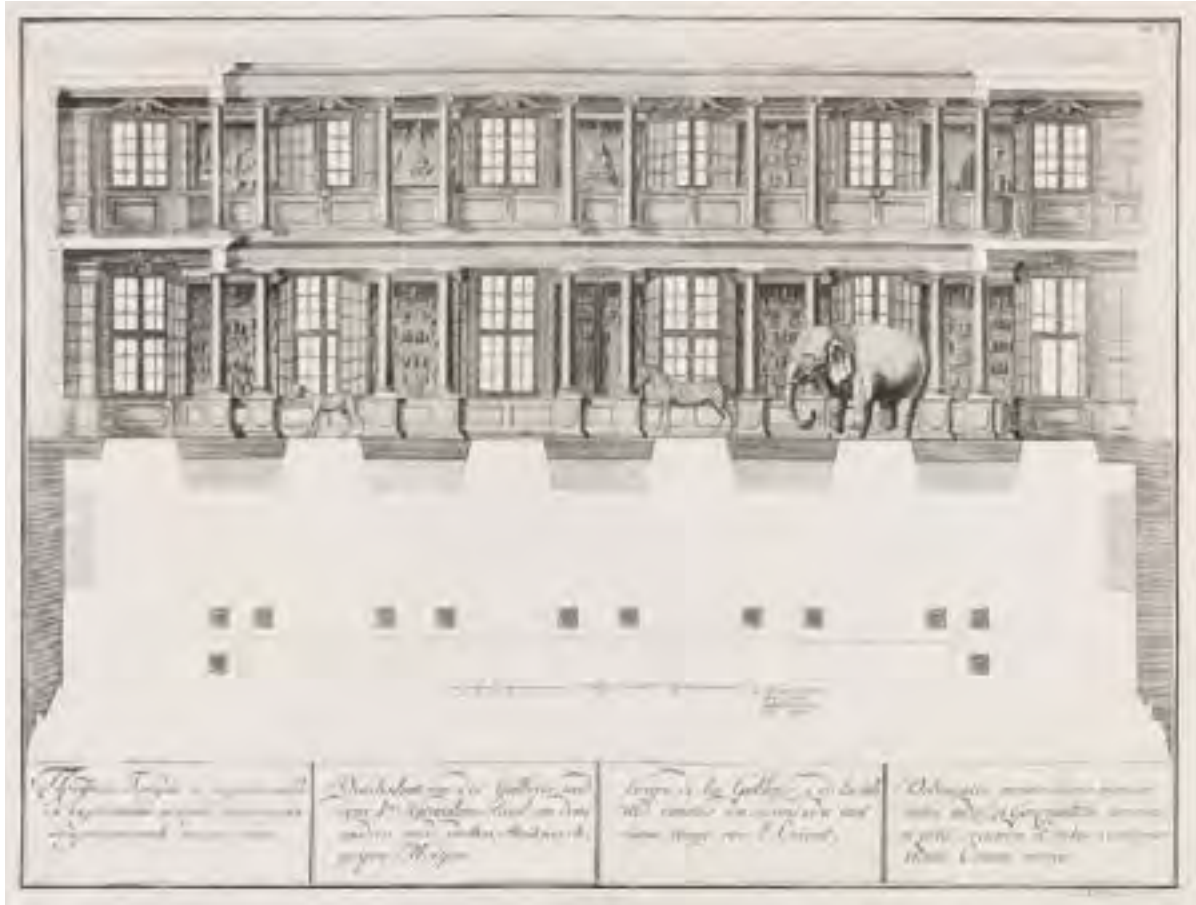
Bottom right-hand corner: 'P:G: Mattarnovy sculp.'

The Library of the Imperial Academy was founded by a decree of Peter the Great in 1714, and by 1725 it contained some 11,000 volumes. Reflecting on the Kunstkamera collection, the Greek physician M. S. Wanderbech wrote: 'For the book lovers there is a library, which would rival the best in its variety and

abundance of volumes.' In 1727 Peter II bequeathed to the Academy the personal library of Peter the Great. In 1728 the Library was transferred to the new academic chambers on Vassilevsky Island, an event which was reported at the time in the St Petersburg Journal (26 November 1728). The same article announced to the public its opening hours: 'Henceforth the Library will be open from 2 until 4 in the afternoon on Tuesdays and Fridays of every week, and any person shall be able to enter it freely' **VL**

Philipp Georg Mattarnovi (1714–1742) Engraving Chamber of the Academy of Sciences, Russia, St Petersburg, 1737  
Paper; etched with burin and acid  
From the principal collection of the Hermitage Academic Library  
Top right-hand corner: 'Tab. VII'  
Centre, below the image: a scale giving the English foot as the unit of measurement  
H. 48, W. 65.5 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 29276





7

**Kunstkamera: cross section of the Gallery and First Hall**

Bottom section of the page, in four columns, the first in Russian: 'Side view of the gallery and the first hall with curiosities and second with rooms to the east. / Durchschnitt von der Gallerie, und dem 1sten Naturalien Saal, in dem andern und dritten Stockwerck, gegen Morgen. / Coupe de la Gallerie & de la Sale des raretés du second and du troisieme étage, vers l'Orient. / Delineatio penetralium porticus intra ædes, et Gazophylacii rer: nat: et artif: secundæ et tertîæ contignationes, Ortum versus.'

Bottom right-hand corner: 'C: A: Wortman Sculp.'

The image depicts the eastern wall with two rows of windows and open cabinets placed between them, with objects inside. Eager to enrich the collection of the Kunstkamera, Peter issued a decree in which he proposed:

Also, if a man should find in the earth or water such ancient things as: stones of great rarity; bones of man, beast, fish or fowl, different from those we have now, or if the same, such as are greater or smaller in size than we are accustomed to; ancient inscriptions in stone, iron or copper too, any unusual old weapon, dish or any other item that is old and rare – to be brought in, and exchanged for a generous payment.

The Kunstkamera had humble beginnings, but was later greatly extended. In 1714 it contained a few hundred fish, birds and serpents, preserved in jars, and which Peter the Great purchased on his first Holland visit in 1698, along with a number of 'freaks' and objects of anatomical interest. In 1716 the great collection of beast, fowl, fish, serpents, lizards, shells and other natural curiosities of Albert Seba from the East and West Indies, and the minerals cabinet of the Danzig physician Gottwald, were added to it. In 1717 the collection of anatomical objects, herbs

and butterflies of the great physician Ruysch was brought over from Holland. In 1725 a cabinet of natural curiosities, and a great number of expensive tools and machinery, all collected by and belonging to Peter the Great himself, were donated. **vl**

Christian-Albert Wortmann (1680/92–1760)  
Engraving Chamber of the Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, 1741  
Paper; etching by burin and acid  
From the principal collection of the Hermitage Academic Library  
Top right-hand corner: 'Tab. X'  
Centre, below the image: a scale with the English foot as the unit of measurement  
H. 47, W. 62.6 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 17144

8–14

**Gold plaques from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great: original drawings**

These plaques came from seventh- to third-century BC Scythian burial mounds. Dug up by bands of treasure-hunters, gold objects of this kind started to appear in the Urals and Siberia as early as the end of the seventeenth century. The Dutch statesman and traveller Nicolaas Witsen (1641–1717) admired them greatly and acquired several examples, illustrated in his work of 1692 *Noord en Oost Tartarye* [Northern and Eastern Tartary]. It was at his house that Peter the Great first saw such antiquities and learned about their provenance; he later attempted to buy the objects from Witsen's widow. That purchase failed, but by 1717 Peter had already formed the nucleus of a serious collection of Siberian antiquities. The Tsar forbade unauthorized excavations of ancient



burial mounds and made treasure-hunting punishable by death. All previously found gold objects had to be delivered to the capital. The Dutch scholar Van Dorts was licensed to excavate for valuable artefacts, and the German botanist Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685–1735) was sent on a seven-year expedition to Siberia, commissioned to explore the region and 'search out all manner of rarities'. Peter's collection eventually numbered some 250 items, stored in the Summer Palace. After the Tsar's death they were transferred to the Kunstkamera and inventoried in 1727 by P. I. Moshkov. That same year, the Imperial Senate again decreed 'treasure-hunting in the steppe forbidden on pain of severe penalty'. Peter had ordered drawings to be made of everything found: his behest was posthumously carried out by an entire team of artists and students from the Draughtsmen's Department of the newly established Academy of Sciences

in St Petersburg. These may have been joined by Georg Unverzagt (1701–1767), Ottomar Ellinger (1703–1735) and Christian-Albert Wortmann (1680/92–1760). During the 1730s the entire Siberian Collection was documented on some 200 sheets. Perhaps someone intended to have these drawings engraved and published in print, but that did not come about. At the end of the nineteenth century the Academy presented them to the Hermitage Museum. **mm**

8. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing one half of a pair of gold belt plaques depicting figures under a tree (see cat. 15)  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 30, W. 45.5 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7158





9. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing two items: a coiled panther accessory on the left (cat. 16) and an ornate belt buckle  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 45.9, W. 29.7 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7078

10. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing the right portion of a gold belt plaque with a contest scene between a tiger and a monster (cat. 17)  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 29.9, W. 45.1 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7156

11. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing a gold belt plaque with a vulture mauling a yak and a tiger (cat. 18)  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 29.6, W. 46.1 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7113





12. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing an elaborate gold spiral bracelet (cat. 20)  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 45.7, W. 29.7 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7149

13. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing, on the left, a gold belt plaque with a scene of a monster attacking a horse (cat. 19)  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 29.8, W. 45.8 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7159

14. Watercolour drawing from the 1730s illustrated inventory of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection showing a gold torc with lion-head terminals (cat. 27)  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 29.7, W. 45.5 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, ERG 7151



Scythian-Siberian ‘Animal Style’ art

The Scytho-Siberian ‘Animal Style’ is typical of the art of Eurasian nomads between the early first millennium BC and the end of the fourth century AD. It appears on body art, clothing, horse furniture, ritual vessels and weapons, and represents a highly complex semiotic system with strong spiritual significance. It uses zoomorphic images as a type of bold visual language that adopts as its starting point a mythological world view. This uses singular or multiple attributes of different species to create a single mythological beast and pays particular attention to the composition and juxtaposition of the figures.<sup>18</sup> This style offers examples of realistic animal imagery along with fantastic monsters that combine the most distinctive features of different species, such as the branched antlers of a deer combined with the body of a predator and the wings and beak of a bird. It typically exhibits a very expressive stylization, balanced form and masterful composition. Representations of fantastic animals carried a special significance, and animal contest scenes were one of the most popular subjects from the second half of the sixth century BC onwards. Zoomorphic images are closely associated with the ideology of a world divided into three vertical planes, namely an upper or heavenly plane, which contains birds; a central plane of the mortal world, represented by ungulates and human beings; and below, the underworld and water. The lowest level denotes not only death but also birth and reproduction, and contains predators, fish, snakes and all kinds of fantastic beasts. The scenes therefore carry deep symbolic meaning and represent a figurative ideogram of the struggle between life and death, as well as their unity. All three levels are connected by animals capable of crossing the borders between them. **EFK**

15

Gold belt buckle of figures under a tree

This outstanding and very famous object has been published many times, as its imagery contains much that is synonymous with what we know about the Scythians. This scene is often referred to in literature as ‘resting under the tree’, and parallels may be drawn to surviving costume, hairstyles and weaponry of the Scythians. However, it should also be examined within a mythological context, as the presence of anthropomorphic characters in the art of the ancient nomads had a high degree of semantic significance, as did the special status of their owners. This is why the female deity, associated with the earth and flora – the tree in this scene is an allusion to the ‘Tree of Life’ – may represent the ‘Great Mother’, who was a giver of life but was also associated with underworld powers. Wedding rituals went hand in hand with ideas of death and funerary rites in archaic communities. The central quiver hanging from the branches of the tree recalls Herodotus’ account of the important role the quiver played in the wedding symbolism of the nomads: ‘There, when a man desires a woman, he hangs his

quiver before her waggon, and has intercourse with her, none hindering.’<sup>19</sup> It appears that this entire scene may refer to a mythical story where the death of the protagonist parallels his marriage to the ‘Great Mother’. This sacred union was seen as a requisite for the renewal of life and the completion of the full cycle of birth, death and rebirth of all living creatures.

This is one half of a pair of symmetrical openwork plaques that formed a belt buckle.<sup>20</sup> The decoration is in low relief and was made through wax casting. The reverse is entirely covered by a cloth impression and has a vertical loop for threading the belt through it. The branches and leaves were bent and shaped at the modelling stage. The horse, human figures and the tree were separately modelled in wax, and the horses’ bridles decorated with additional small twists of wax. All of the details were mounted on the lower bar and attached with wax as the solder. Cloth was used to create individual casting moulds. **EFK, RSM**

Gold; cast  
H. 12.3, L. 16.1 cm, wt 465.04 g  
Fourth to third century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/162





Gold plaque in the shape of a coiled panther

This plaque has three loops on the reverse and may have been used as a clothing accessory or, more probably, part of a horse bridle. Judging by its style, it is one of the earliest in the Siberian Collection. The design concept of a feline predator coiled into a circle with accentuated inlays in the details of the nostrils, ears, tip of the tail and paws is one of the most typical of the Eurasian nomad 'Animal Style' art, particularly in the early stages. This motif represents a highly significant ideogram that probably reflects the ancient nomadic view of the world, but the exact meaning of each 'Animal Style' image remains a mystery. They appear to have a mythological subtext, but only suggestions can be made as to the possible thoughts behind the full-circle design, the relationship of this to wider beliefs about the surrounding world, the mythological context or ideological standpoints. The plaque was cast from a wax model, with the animal cast in a standing position and then bent

into a circle.<sup>21</sup> The impression of this model was used to create the face of the mould; wax was poured inside and then removed a few seconds later. Casting channels were added to the new hollow copy, and the back of the mould was formed over the wax model; the plaque was then cast. The finished cast had inlay compartments soldered on, as well as three equidistant attachment loops soldered to the reverse.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the panther shape would originally have had colourful inlays, such as turquoise, which were subsequently lost. This style of precious ornamentation is traditional and shared by a number of ancient eastern cultures. **EFK, RSM**

Gold; cast  
L. 10.9, W. 8.9 cm, wt 221.91 g  
Seventh century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/88



Belt buckle with a contest scene between a tiger and a monster

This is one half of a pair of decorative plaques that formed a belt buckle. In the contest scene a realistically depicted tiger is pitted against a fantastic beast with the body of a panther, the head of a wolf with a volute-like heavy beaked bird's head for a nose and deer's antlers with the tines ending in birds of prey. Such detail in the representations of fantastic predators is characteristic of later Scythian and Sarmatian 'Animal Style' art and suggests a close connection between the two. Along with other surreal features of the beast, such detail allows its attribution to the mythical menagerie of the underworld. The scenes of animal contest are one of the most popular motifs of 'Animal Style' art from the second half of the sixth century BC and represent concepts of sacrifice: the killing of a living creature, usually an ungulate, by a predator from the underworld ensures preservation of the world order and continual rebirth within a cyclical concept of being. On the beast's horn, within the contour of the ears

and some other areas of the zoomorphic design, where traditionally there were coloured inlays, there are simply shallow hollows: in this case, the inlays were never inserted and the empty hollows suggest the abandonment of this long tradition. **EFK**

Gold; cast with cloth impression on the reverse  
H. 10, L. 16.8 cm, wt 526.85 g  
Fourth to third century BC  
Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent in his first parcel by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, January 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/11







18  
**Gold belt plaque with vulture mauling a yak and a tiger**

This is one of a pair of symmetrical plaques used to fasten a belt. The reverse shows a cloth impression, which is evidence of the specific moulding technique. This method of moulding was also used by Chinese craftsmen, among others. Two horizontal loops are soldered from top to bottom on the back, which allowed it to be attached to a belt. Small holes in the turquoise inlays suggest they are recycled beads. Opulent decoration on the belts and highly ornate buckles with graphic motifs help convey the world view of the early nomads. Peter the Great's collection contains fourteen pairs of different plaques, mainly in 'Animal Style', and these remain the only such collection of gold belt ornaments of such chronological and cultural variety. **EFK**

Gold, turquoise; cast with cloth impression on the reverse  
H. 10, L. 15.1 cm, wt 328.03 g  
Fourth to second century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/3

19  
**Belt plaque with a monster attacking a horse**

This is one half of a pair of decorative plaques belonging to a belt buckle. The mauling scene depicts a fantastic winged monster with a feline body and horns attacking a fallen horse, whose body creates an S-shaped curve. The hindquarters of the monster and the horse are at 180 degrees to each other, so that the horse's hind legs end up in the air and the monster's are turned vertically to the left as viewed. The thighs of both animals were originally highlighted with geometric inlays, possibly turquoise but now missing, consisting of a circle with an adjacent curvilinear triangle (or two triangles on two sides). This motif is characteristic of objects of the greater Iranian world, including items in the Oxus Treasure and the burial mounds at Pazyryk in the Altai mountains of southern Siberia. The inlay sockets are double-lined with a fine indented line. The horse's shoulder is also marked with a similar, though reduced, ornamental figure of a small circle with a single curvilinear triangle. The closest iconographic parallels on

zoomorphic objects have been recovered in the burial mound at Issyk in present-day Kazakhstan, and are about the same date. The reverse is completely covered in circular indentations, which were created either from forging the gold plaque or hammering the relief, and there are traces of hammering on the face. On the face there is a fastening hook. The reverse has four loops soldered in pairs, one above the other, for vertical fastening.<sup>23</sup>

**EFK, RSM**  
Gold; hammered and soldered, inlaid  
H. 8.2, W. 12.3 cm, wt 155.93 g  
Fourth to third century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, on 12 December 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/6





20

**Gold spiral bracelet with zoomorphic terminals**

This spiral coiled bracelet ends with an animal contest scene on the terminals: the elongated figure of a feline predator (a tiger) with the foreleg of a red deer emerging from its mouth. These figures were cast separately and then soldered onto the ends. The zoomorphic style is highly developed and the entire composition is driven by the form of the subject. The stripes on the tiger's back are executed with a line of small notches down the centre of its scruff and spine, while the eyes are triangular with a dotted pupil in the centre. The broad antlers of the red deer are exaggerated by a raised contour and follow close to the line of the neck; the front tines are pressed against the top of the deer's snout while its forelegs are stretched out directly under its ear, and it has a triangular dotted pupil in the eye. Spiral bracelets and torcs are typical of the Eurasian nomadic peoples of the last centuries BC. These ornaments were worn by the nomadic elite. **EFK**

Gold; cast, then hammered, soldered  
Diam. 10 cm, wt 702.33 g  
Fourth to third century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, on 12 December 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/55



21

**Gold hollow spiral torc with zoomorphic terminals**

This hollow spiral torc is decorated on the ends with feline predators, perhaps tigers. The torc consists of two parts connected by a wooden spigot. The predators have elongated bodies and paws pressed tightly against their bodies. Their long tails are decorated with segmented rows of turquoise inlay and end in vultures' heads. The rest of the predator has decoration along the ribs, thighs, shoulders, neck and scruff, but most of the inlays here are missing. The eyes and teardrop-shaped ears were also inlaid with turquoise, as were the decorative hollows in the cheeks of the predators and vultures. All the inlay hollows are outlined with a double-incised contour. The snout tends to be raised. This torc belongs to the same stylistic group as objects from the Oxus Treasure, and there are other parallels among torcs from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great and the burial mound at Issyk in Kazakhstan.<sup>24</sup> **EFK**

Gold, turquoise; cast, soldered  
Diam. 25 cm, wt 617.64 g  
Fourth to third century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, on 12 December 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/62





22

**Gold belt plaque with a hunting scene of horsemen pursuing wild boar**

This is one half of a pair of symmetrical, but not identical, openwork plaques that were worn as a belt buckle.<sup>26</sup> Rather than representing an ordinary hunt, the scene probably depicts a heroic or mythical story of a ritual hunt, which was laden with symbolism and may be viewed as the sacred royal hunt, the equivalent of a sacrifice. The plate is made in low relief and cast with subsequent hammering. The reverse shows cloth impressions and has a single surviving loop, two pins and two hooks for the belt. Instead of the more traditional Eurasian use of turquoise inlay, this example is decorated with opaque blue glass imitations. This pair of plaques is the largest in Peter the Great's collection, and perhaps in the entire group. They stand out from the series not only for their size but also in

their style. Certain parallels can be drawn with the composition and iconographic detail on Ordos plates from northern China, and this confirms the distinct cultural attribution of these objects. M. P. Zavitukhina dated them to the mid-first millennium BC, but this is likely to be incorrect. More convincing is the argument of K. I. Rets, who dated hunting-scene plaques to the late third to second century BC and compared them with objects belonging to the early Hun culture. However, the question of the ethnic attribution of these plaques, as well as the place of their manufacture, remains uncertain. Moreover, the suggestion that they are of Chinese origin is not supported by the scientific analysis of the glass inlays, as the levels of barium in the glass are much lower than would be expected of Chinese production. **EFK**

Gold, smalt, coral; cast and hammered, inlaid  
H. 10.6, L. 20 cm, wt 464.22 g  
Third to second century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/70



23–24

**Pair of gold belt plaques with a scene of a tiger battling a camel**

This pair of plaques were cast and have cloth impressions on the reverse, but lack any loops or pins that would have allowed them to be attached to the belt: this implies that they were never used, and may have been especially made as grave goods. They show a tiger fighting a Bactrian camel.<sup>26</sup> The camel is depicted realistically, while at the tip of the tiger's tail there is a small head of a bird of prey, a detail that betrays the mythical nature of the entire scene. The camel fits somewhere between predators and herbivores in 'Animal Style' art. This is due to the formidable fangs and bad temper of male camels. These plaques differ from others of this type in the Siberian Collection because of their much smaller size. The animals, locked in battle, are depicted beneath a tree, the canopy of which frames the scene. The leaves and the tiger's ear

both have shallow hollows inside the contour, but it is apparent that these never contained any inlay. The tree canopy resembles the style used to convey landscape detail on the Ordos bronzes. These plaques are attributed to the R-type frameless belt plaques that are typologically considered to precede the rectangular framed ones.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, this detail alone cannot be used to date them. They were cast using the lost-wax technique. The backs show traces of cloth impressions.<sup>28</sup> This pair of plaques probably comes from the same set as a double-plaque (fig. 38, p. 69) that was made by soldering together wax models of the left and right plaques: the point of junction left a vertical seam along the tiger's fur, which was concealed by beating. **EFK, RSM**

Gold; cast with cloth impression on the back  
H. 5.3, W. 8 cm, wt 87.88 g; H. 5.4, W. 8 cm, wt 87.88 g  
Third to second century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/15; Si 1727 1/242





25  
**Gold belt plaque with dragons and a 'Tree of Life'**

This is one of a pair of plaques forming a belt clasp. Eight smaller plaques measuring 5.5 × 3.8 cm are decorated with a very similar but somewhat simplified motif and evidently come from the same set.<sup>29</sup> Rectangular framed plaques like these probably follow another type that lacks a border. The red inlays are made of cornelian, a type of quartz, whereas the blue inlays are opaque glass and imitate turquoise. Some of the smaller plaques in the set are decorated with actual turquoise, others have a mixture of glass and stone, and two small plaques never had inlays and may be later replacements for lost pieces. The fantastic animals resemble Chinese dragons and hark back to the art of the Ordos culture of northern China. Imagery of this kind survived in the art of the Sarmatians until the first century AD, and can be found for example on a gold four-lobed dagger scabbard from one of the rich first-century graves at Tillya

Tepe in northern Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> These graves at Tillya Tepe were initially regarded by the excavator as belonging to Yuezhi or Kushan nobility, but they are most likely to be tombs of a local tribal chief and his family who had strong connections with the *Sakā* cultures of Central Asia.<sup>31</sup> **EFK**

Gold, cornelian, glass; cast, inlaid  
L. 15.1, H. 9 cm, wt 352.99 g  
Second to first century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, in 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727/1/157

26  
**Gold bridle fitting with animal contest scene of a feline predator mauling an elk**

This circular plaque with a bow-like loop on the reverse depicts an animal contest scene. The elk's snout has certain beak-like traits and its ear is pointing forwards in an unrealistic manner, suggesting that this creature is intended to be a mythical rather than natural beast. The style of the scene shows clear traces of Achaemenid influence, for example in the geometric decorative motif on the animal's body, but where it was made is unknown. **EFK**

Gold; cast and hammered  
Diam. 4.6 cm, wt 28.62 g  
Fifth to third century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/29



27  
**Gold torc with lion-head terminals**

Inspired by earlier composite pieces, this torc has a double-locking mechanism and consists of two hollow curved tubes with intervening spheres; an additional tube around the front is joined to the others with thick wire that runs from the lions' foreheads down to the lower edge. The relief surface decoration imitates twisted gold thread. Since the finely modelled hollow zoomorphic terminals are Hellenistic in style, the piece has rightly been attributed to a Greco-Bactrian workshop located somewhere in the territories of northern Afghanistan or southern Uzbekistan, suggesting a date between the late fourth and third centuries BC.<sup>32</sup> **EFK**

Gold; chased and soldered  
Diam. 17 cm, wt 214.33 g  
Late fourth to third century BC  
Southern Siberia; Siberian Collection of Peter the Great  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/145

# Gold plaques from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great: manufacturing techniques

Peter the Great’s famous collection of Siberian antiquities includes a number of spectacular gold plaques depicting fantastic animals. S. I. Rudenko (1885–1969) was the first to observe cloth impressions on the backs of some, and he suggested that the plaques were based on wax models cast in two-part clay moulds. He argued that one half of the mould was made by impressing a metal or carved wooden prototype into clay, which was then fired and filled with wax; the excess wax was removed with a piece of cloth or leather and a second layer of clay was laid over the hardened wax, thus forming the back of the mould. The complete mould was then dried and fired, after which molten gold was poured into it.<sup>33</sup> Cast metal objects with similar cloth impressions on the back have also been found in Tuva (southern Siberia) and China, where they first appear in the third to first centuries BC in the easternmost Chinese regions.<sup>34</sup>

Rudenko’s theory has never been questioned, and has been used to explain similar cloth impressions on the backs of later Avar-culture belt ornaments and Scandinavian round brooches. However, these impressions are not present on all plaques in the Siberian Collection, and other features show how these plaques were manufactured. The concave shapes on the backs match the relief on the front, rather like a negative image. The plaques are of uniform thickness, except where folds in the cloth have left impressions. Their backs also have a fitting system, which was cast together with the walls but lacks cloth impressions. Experimental reconstructions show that pressing out the extra wax with cloth does not result in uniform thickness, nor does it create a negative image on the back. Another hypothesis is that the plaques were made by pressing a carved wooden or clay prototype into clay, filling the impression with wax and reinforcing the back with cloth; the hard wax was then removed, the front coated with clay slip in order to make the mould, and in some cases the cloth support soaked to such a degree that it left no impression or any trace in the finished product. The direct observations and research outlined below prove that both theories are incorrect. They give new insights into the manufacturing techniques and show that the plaques were made in different ways, using casting and cold-working manual techniques.

**Casting from a cloth-cum-clay model (cats 15, 17–18, 25):** most cast gold plaques from the Siberian Collection have cloth impressions on the back (fig. 37).



## OPPOSITE

Fig. 37  
Cast gold plaque with cloth impression on the back  
Si 1727 1/15

Fig. 38  
Cast gold plaque made using a composite wax model  
Si 1727 1/14

Figs 39–40  
High-relief cast gold object with a hollow back  
Si 1727 1/32

Fig. 41  
Gold plaque with traces of hammering on the back  
Si 1727 1/6

## ABOVE

Figs 42–43  
Gold plaque made by hammering gold sheet over a matrix  
Si 1727 1/1

All State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

The fronts of the moulds in which they were cast were made by pressing a wax or wooden prototype into wet clay. A piece of cloth was then placed within this impression of the dried front mould, and a second clay lump added in order to make the back of the mould; the casting channels and fitting system were then added. The walls of the cast object ended up having the same thickness as the cloth originally placed within the mould. The Siberian Collection contains several plaques with mirror-image versions of the same composition. Among these is a unique piece with symmetrical decoration (fig. 38; see also cats 23–24): this was cast from a composite wax model. The front of the mould, in which high relief with a hollow back was cast, consisted of two parts (figs 39–40).

**Casting from a lost thin wax model (cat. 16):** the front of the clay mould was impressed with a wooden or wax prototype, the impression filled with molten wax, which was then poured out so that only a layer remained adhering to the clay and allowing a thinner and lighter cast to be made. Negative relief was formed on the back of this wax layer and a second clay lump was pressed over the wax to form the back of the mould. Objects cast using this method have no cloth impressions; in some cases the fitting system was evidently soldered onto the already finished cast.

**Chasing:** several plaques that depict a fantastic predator attacking a horse are the only objects in the Siberian Collection with chasing (cat. 19). Their backs are covered with traces of hammering (fig. 41), but chasing was used on the front to emphasize relief and indicate the spines of the animals.

**Matrix-formed relief:** rather than simply cast, as previously suggested, some plaques were made by cold-working, using the basma technique of laying gold sheet over a carved wooden matrix and beating it over the underlying relief (figs 42–43). The cells for stone inlays were made as follows: a small knob was formed over the matrix as part of the relief, the plaque removed, the back of the knob filled with a soft material such as organic mastic, and a socket chased into it; occasionally the mastic was left inside in order to protect the object from accidental deformation.<sup>35</sup>

Where the decoration included openwork, this was added after the plaque had been cast or chased. Some plaques were repaired in antiquity as the original cast hooks or loops intended to attach them to leather belts broke off, and replacements had to be soldered on. **RSM**



K. V. Chugunov

### **3 Early nomads of Central Asia and southern Siberia**



# Early nomads of Central Asia and southern Siberia

K. V. Chugunov

The Scythians say that their nation is the youngest in all the world.<sup>1</sup>

The study of early Iron Age nomadic cultures of the eastern parts of northern Eurasia (the Altai-Sayan mountains, and the mountain-steppe areas of Central Asia in Mongolia and north-west China) is complex. Unlike areas such as the northern Black Sea region or parts of Central Asia, which were close to and therefore described by ancient Greek and Near Eastern writers, this region was too remote, and we hardly even know the names of its peoples. Chinese chronicles of the Shang and Zhou periods (about 1600–256 BC) only mention tribes who lived in close proximity to the central Chinese plain: Ch’iang, Ti and Zhung are probably synonymous with the Greek term ‘barbarian’ and covered all non-Chinese peoples. They may have had some connection with the distant northern regions, and archaeological research demonstrates numerous parallels between their material culture and that of the nomads of Siberia. The direction and nature of these relations is still far from clear, but it is important to note that Yin texts from the end of the second millennium BC already contain epithets such as ‘breeders of horses’ and ‘do not eat grain’ in connection with tribes on the Chinese borders.<sup>2</sup> These terms are reminiscent of the ‘dairy eaters’ and ‘mare milkers’ mentioned by Homer, who are usually correlated with the Cimmerians and the Scythians. The descriptions of Scythians given in these written sources can be closely compared with the results of archaeological research in southern Siberia and Central Asia.

Located in the heart of Eurasia in present-day southern Siberia, Tuva was probably one of the regions where this early nomadic lifestyle first developed (fig. 44). Part of the great steppe corridor,

Tuva was closely connected with its southern and western neighbours. Its claim to be one of the likely birthplaces of Scythian culture is supported by discoveries at the site of Arzhan-1, a burial mound where archaeological excavations revealed the oldest-known artefacts characteristic of a Scythian-type nomadic culture and given the modern term of the ‘Scythian triad’: these consist of weapons, horse gear and ‘Animal Style’ ornaments. An early date for this burial was first argued on typological grounds and has now been confirmed by radiocarbon dating, which indicates the late ninth or early eighth century BC. This makes it considerably earlier than any of the Scythian burial mounds in Europe, whose chronology is based on written records and the presence of ancient Greek and Near Eastern imports.

Arzhan-1 was excavated in the early 1970s under the direction of M. P. Gryaznov and M. H. Mannai-ool (see pp. 78–79). The site had been thoroughly disturbed and looted in the past, yet it was possible to trace at the original ground level a very unusual structure of radiating larch trunks, which formed individual cells surrounding the blockhouse tomb of a couple assumed to be a king and queen (or concubine), who were placed in separate coffins (fig. 45). Around them, but still within the central chamber, lay the bodies of eight more individuals, also mostly in coffins. Some additional burials lay to the north and south-west, giving a total of fifteen bodies.<sup>3</sup> Despite previous looting, archaeologists recovered a significant assemblage of artefacts, mainly associated with horse burials in the radiating cells; almost 160 horses were found in all. Arzhan-1 therefore illustrates the high level that local nomadic culture had attained even by this early period.

The finds include horse gear, boars’ tusks used as bridle ornaments (cat. 155), weapons, fragments of

Fig. 44  
View of the landscape near Arzhan in Tuva.



coloured cloth (cats 43–46) and items of decorative art, including a large plaque in the shape of a crouching feline and some terminals with standing ram figures that illustrate the beginnings of the ‘Animal Style’ typical of early nomadic art. Differences in bridle detail suggest that the numerous horses had been presented to the deceased ruler by various subject tribes. This led the excavators to assume that the principal male burial was the leader of an early tribal confederation of Central Asian nomads who, by the beginning of the first millennium BC, had developed a common culture.<sup>4</sup> Detailed examination of all the excavated artefacts and the wooden structure itself appears to show that this monument was built over a period of time, was not just a tomb and might have been some form of religious centre for early horse-breeding nomads.<sup>5</sup>

A second burial mound was excavated in the same valley between 2000 and 2004 and is known as Arzhan-2 (see pp. 80–81). Measuring 75 metres across and 2 metres high, this monument is the largest in the region after Arzhan-1. The main burial was discovered in 2001 and proved to be unrobbed. It contained a very rich set of grave goods, as two skeletons, one male and the other female, were literally covered with gold ornaments originally attached to their clothing (fig. 46); the man was also wearing a massive gold neck torc, which resembles a plain one in Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection (fig. 34). The wealth of grave goods indicates that the deceased belonged to the highest levels of nomadic society and may have been regarded as a king.

The gold ornaments were so densely arranged that tracing their position made it possible to reconstruct the clothing and other details of the royal burial. For example, next to the buried king lay a waist belt and a shoulder belt with a richly decorated case. The latter was covered with boar-shaped plaques (cats 121–22) and has been reconstructed as having two compartments, a bow case and a quiver: the quiver’s wooden base (cat. 123) was preserved inside a scale-patterned gold cover, the decoration on which is strikingly similar to that on the nomadic bow cases (*gorytoi*) depicted on ancient Greek pottery (cat. 211). The belt to which the bow case had been attached was decorated with cast gold ornaments in the shape of double spirals (cats 127–28). Similar ornaments made of bronze are known from contemporary sites elsewhere in Tuva but, more importantly, have also been found at the Yuhuangmiao burial ground in north-west China, and may indicate links between these two regions.

In addition to the principal burial, Arzhan-2 contained over ten others, fourteen horse skeletons, and five ritual deposits of horse tackle and bridle ornaments (cat. 154). All were undisturbed and yielded a number of objects, including bronze knives, pointed battle axes (cat. 134), mirrors, composite wooden combs (cat. 57), wooden drinking bowls with single handles in the form of a horse’s leg, belt ornaments and sets of arrowheads (cats 129, 132). One of the female burials has preserved remnants of woollen clothing and multicoloured woven sashes. There were





Fig. 45  
Wooden coffin in chamber 31  
at Arzhan-1.

Fig. 46  
Finds *in situ* in the main tomb  
at Arzhan-2.

also many coloured glass, stone and amber beads (cats 72–74) and some gold earrings decorated with granulation and semi-precious stones (cat. 68). These objects have parallels in Tuva and further afield and allow the monument to be dated with some precision, as the typology of the horse tackle and arrowheads points to the seventh century BC; this is confirmed by the radiocarbon dates. The two ‘royal’ burials from Tuva therefore form fixed chronological points for other archaeological material from the entire region inhabited by Scythian-type nomadic tribes in the east: for instance, bridle bits similar to those from Arzhan-1 and evidently contemporary with them have been found in Altai.

The northern part of the substructure at Arzhan-1 yielded a partially preserved stone stela decorated with pecked depictions of deer and boars. This find suggests a similar date for a large number of other rock drawings found throughout Central Asia and southern Siberia, which are executed in what is known as the ‘Arzhan–Maiemir style’ (fig. 47).<sup>6</sup> Typical of this style are representations of deer with straight legs found on Tagar culture knives and a mirror from the Altai site of Bukhtarma (cat. 64). Representations of a crouching feline also belong to the earliest stages of nomadic art and, in addition to the find from Arzhan-1, are known from the Tagar culture (cat. 84), a burial site at Chilikty and Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection (cat. 16). Such imagery may have originated in early China and spread from there at the very beginning of the first millennium BC.<sup>7</sup> Typical Scythian artefacts, such as bell-shaped terminals (cat. 177) and cast bronze helmets (cat. 148), may be of similar origin.<sup>8</sup> The Arzhan-1 stela also throws light on the so-called ‘deer stones’ that are sporadically known

from Europe and dated there to the pre-Scythian period (cat. 28). In Central Asia these monuments belong to the early phase of nomadic culture. Their appearance much further west evidently indicates some sort of ethnic migration. Initially they were schematically carved with marks indicating a belt with weapons, a necklace, earrings and a few oblique lines for the face: in the European steppes, this early type seems to have been replaced by true stone sculptures but in Asia it was retained throughout the early Scythian period.

Carvings in the so-called ‘Arzhan–Maiemir style’ were also found on some stone slabs that had been deliberately reused in the construction of Arzhan-2 (cats 29–30), with some other representations added (fig. 48).<sup>9</sup> The decorative motifs found at Arzhan-2 evidently continued traditions formed at the very beginning of early nomadic culture. Just like the objects from Arzhan-1, the extremely rich assemblage of artefacts from Arzhan-2 allows a closer dating of a number of antiquities from far outside Tuva. Many parallels exist with Tagar culture bronzes and with Saka monuments in modern Kazakhstan, as well as with objects found at sites in northern China: as a whole, these comparisons demonstrate the sources of nomadic culture in Tuva during the early Scythian period.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of these excavations in Tuva, Tagar culture antiquities found in the adjacent region of the Altai-Sayan mountains and Minusinsk basin can be seen in a completely new light. It now appears that the steppe valleys of Minusinsk in Khakassia were among the earliest homelands of Scythian-type tribes, and weapons found there are comparable to those from Arzhan-1 (fig. 49); the same holds true of terminals found in Tagar burial mounds and of some splendid



Fig. 47  
Detail of rock art in the Sulfat  
mountains, Khakassia.

Fig. 48  
Rock art on slab reused in the  
construction of the edge of the  
seventh-century BC burial mound  
at Arzhan-2 (see cat. 30).

specimens of archaic ‘Animal Style’ decorative art. Only an early date can explain the common presence in this region of plaques shaped like a deer with bent legs (cats 78–81): this image is typical of the early Scythian period across the Eurasian steppes, beginning with Scythian artefacts proper from the northern edges of the Black Sea and the Caucasus (cat. 120) and ending with the Chilikty burial mounds in present-day Kazakhstan (cat. 82).

Tagar culture burial mounds were surrounded by enclosures of standing slabs with high stelae erected at the corners. These are very impressive and have long attracted scholarly attention; the first proper archaeological excavations to be conducted in Siberia, by D. G. Messerschmidt in 1722 and G. F. Miller and I. G. Gmelin in 1739, focused on these monuments (fig. 50). Many remarkable bronze objects that entered the Hermitage Museum from the collections of V. V. Radlov (1837–1918), I. A. Lopatin (1839–1909), P. N. Kornilov and I. P. Kuznetsov were found in the Minusinsk region. Beginning with A. V. Adrianov (1854–1920) and S. A. Teploukhov (1888–1934), several generations of modern archaeologists have studied the Tagar culture burial mounds, and the first chronology of antiquities from the central Yenisei littoral was developed by Teploukhov in 1929.<sup>11</sup> However, most of the Tagar culture horse and bridle ornaments are chance finds, since these objects were not buried with the deceased (fig. 51).

The region’s inhabitants probably did not have a nomadic way of life. The remains of permanent structures have been excavated at a few settlement sites, and some of the numerous petroglyphs that survive in the Minusinsk valley from this period and slightly later contain images of circular log dwellings (fig. 109). Their



economy was probably mixed but dominated by animal husbandry. The Tagar culture was very conservative and developed gradually over a long period without noticeable change. It originated with migrants who entered the Minusinsk valley in the late Bronze Age. It is now thought that this migration might have occurred as early as the end of the second millennium BC.

After a certain point, miniature copies of actual objects began to be deposited as grave goods and became widespread in the Minusinsk valley. These are also attested in other regions and may have been introduced from elsewhere. Artefacts discovered in excavated settlements or as chance finds show that the Tagar culture developed advanced methods of metal casting. Composite moulds or the lost-wax casting technique were used for manufacturing tools (cats 136–37), large bronze cauldrons, pointed battle-axes (fig. 52) and highly decorated plaques bearing animal imagery (cat. 83). There are also iron daggers with complex ‘Animal Style’ ornament on their hilts (cats 140–46). Iron weapons must have been valued highly, since some show signs of repair.

The Tagar culture exerted a strong influence on neighbouring regions and during its height spread far to the north-west of the Minusinsk valley, along the outlying ridges of the Altai mountains as far as present-day Krasnoyarsk, but, as with many other Scythian-type archaeological cultures, it disappeared at the end of the first millennium BC.

In contrast to the gradual development of the Tagar culture, other regions inhabited by Scythian-type tribes were subject to outside influences in the second half of the sixth century BC. This resulted in an almost universal transformation of culture, including the funeral rites, which are our main source of



information about early Scythian nomadic culture. In Tuva, mass burials appear and handmade pottery starts being buried with the deceased (cat. 104), whereas previously it had been placed above ground over the burial. Weapons were worn in a different manner and more advanced types of artefacts appear. ‘Animal Style’ decoration was enriched with new representations of griffins and birds with prominent ears. These innovations were evidently caused by an influx of migrants from the nomadic regions west of Tuva, and the region may have been conquered by people belonging to the Pazyryk culture from the Altai where there was a longer tradition of this style.

The first burial mounds appear at Tuekta and Bashadar, and the distinctive Altai style of decoration starts to influence the arts of Tuva and the vast region of southern and western Siberia. This influence is especially clear on bone and horn carvings (cats 76–77). At the same time, some intertwined animal figures carved in horn resemble so-called ‘enigma drawings’ of the early Scythian period, and suggest some degree of continuity (fig. 53). Some objects might indicate the origin of innovations that spread westward about 600 BC: thus, needles shaped like boars’ tusks or ornaments terminating with a bird’s curved beak on one side and a snow leopard’s head on the other are typical of the nomad culture in the Volga and Ural regions. Small cauldron-shaped incense burners with a rounded base are common in ritual deposits from present-day Kazakhstan (fig. 54); these also regularly include tripod-footed metal



cauldrons (cat. 111) and sacrificial stone tables carved with representations of human and animal figures.

At the end of the Scythian period, the steppe to the north-west of the Altai mountains was inhabited by nomads who maintained far-reaching contacts to both the west and the east, and many of the masterpieces described in Chapter 2 from Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection come from this region. A large burial mound excavated near the village of Bugry, near the Russian–Kazakh border, has yielded four warrior figurines that may have decorated the wooden model of such a table.<sup>12</sup> The Bugry burial mound had been thoroughly looted in the past, but a few surviving objects illustrate these contacts: sherds from a glass vessel which is probably of Near Eastern manufacture, Chinese lacquer and a decorative silver plaque whose closest known parallels come from the Ordos desert. The burials were originally very sumptuous, and the clothing belonging to the deceased was entirely covered with small gold plaques, of which a few survived. Although the funerary rites cannot be fully reconstructed, they appear to have been similar to those of the so-called ‘Golden Man’ from the burial mound at Issyk in Kazakhstan (fig. 77), and some small plaques found in the tomb at Bugry (cat. 86) also resemble the face shown on a gold finger ring from the Issyk burial mound.<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 49  
Tagar culture daggers.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 5531/253, 275, 279

Fig. 50  
Tagar burial complex in Khakassia.



**LEFT, TOP**  
Fig. 51  
Cast bronze horse bits.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 5531/1282, 1296

**LEFT, CENTRE**  
Fig. 52  
Cast bronze pointed battle-axe head  
and butt. L. of axe head 16.7 cm.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 5531/197, 203

**ABOVE**  
Fig. 53  
Carved horn container. H. 5 cm.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 2940/1, 9

**LEFT, BOTTOM**  
Fig. 54  
Cast bronze incense burner.  
H. 20.3 cm.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 2934/5



Arzhan-1

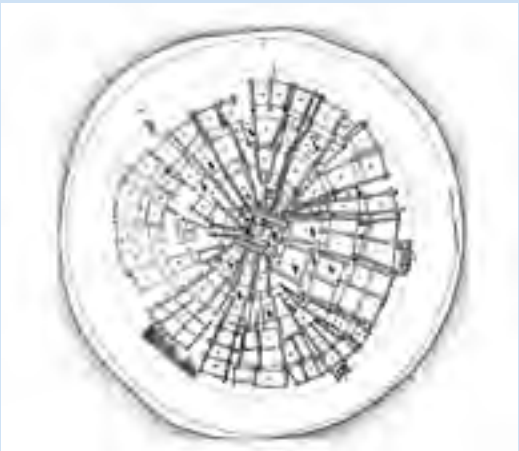
Herodotus, the ‘father of history’, favoured the following version of the Scythians’ origin story: ‘The nomad Scythians inhabiting Asia entered the north Caucasus from the east.’<sup>14</sup> This assumption of an Asiatic origin for the Scythians divided academics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but was finally confirmed through excavations between 1971 and 1974 at the royal burial mound of Arzhan-1 directed by M. P. Gryaznov and M. H. Mannai-ool.<sup>15</sup> This is one of the oldest Scythian sites in Eurasia, tree-ring dated to the end of the ninth and beginning of the eighth century BC, and well-preserved materials allow a detailed reconstruction of different aspects of early nomadic life and death. This was not just a tumulus but a truncated conical platform built of stone slabs using a dry masonry technique, and originally it measured 120 m across and up to 4 m high. The site had been thoroughly disturbed and looted, yet a very unusual and complex wooden-beam structure was found beneath the stonework and at the original ground level (fig. 55). This contained seventy chambers built of smoothed larch trunks measuring 30–85 cm across that formed individual cells surrounding a central chamber measuring 8 m across and 2.6 m high (fig. 56). This held robbed coffins containing the toe bones of an elderly man and woman, who have been interpreted as a king and his queen (or concubine). Other burials lay to the north and south-west, giving a total of fifteen bodies. Over 160 horses were interred in rooms around the central chamber and may represent the entire herd of the central couple. Wooden boards formed a slanting outside wall and the top was covered with round-sectioned branches.

This appears to be more than just a large tomb and it has been argued that it represents a model of the universe of the ancient nomads of Central Asia. The wooden structure is reminiscent of the sun with its radiating beams. Arzhan-1 has a tripartite composition, with the stone burial mound symbolizing heaven, the wooden structure at the centre containing the human and horse burials (fig. 57), and the underworld below. There are also differences between the eastern and western parts. More than 300 rounded stones, each about 3 m across, had been placed in a crescent pattern east of the burial mound, and the numbers of horses buried in the separate chambers may also be symbolic, with the largest number interred in the eastern portion. This represents one of the earliest Eurasian sites where a horse appears to have been equated with a day or a year, and this idea is reflected in the number of horses buried in fourth-century BC burial mounds excavated by N. I. Veselovsky near Kuban, as 360 horses (representing a year) were found at Ul’sk y Aul, and 30 horses (a month) were found at burial mound 19 at Voronezh village.<sup>16</sup> The design of the chambers resembles an anticlockwise spiral, and the emphasis on the eastern part of the burial mound may correspond to the sacred notion of the east representing spring, sunrise, birth and rebirth.<sup>17</sup> Dendrochronological analyses indicated that Arzhan-1 was constructed in August or September and, judging by the construction, all the burials were interred at once.

Fig. 55  
Plan of the excavated structures at Arzhan-1.

Fig. 56  
Detail of the plan showing the main central tomb in the centre of the monument at Arzhan-1.

Fig. 57  
Detailed view of the excavated structures at Arzhan-1.  
Photo by M. Gryaznov. Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture, St Petersburg



Despite being looted, Arzhan-1 produced many finds, including early textiles (cats 43–46) and glass beads in the central chamber and horse gear with the horses in the side chambers. Cheekpieces with three holes in the sides and centre have close parallels to horn cheekpieces from Kurtu-2 in Altai. Other elements of horse gear and horse-related art from Altai-Sayan show the emergence of a nomadic cultural complex that spread across the Eurasian steppe. A large bronze plaque in the shape of a coiled feline predator served as a horse breastplate and represents the earliest example of Scythian ‘Animal Style’ art. Such images, made later than Arzhan-1, have been found not just in Altai-Sayan, but also in other regions, including Siberia, Kuban, China and south-west Asia (cats 16, 82).<sup>18</sup> Five bronze pommels from Arzhan-1 represent a mountain ram with its head held high and may have decorated a chariot, as a wooden yoke was found in one chamber (cat. 175). These can be compared to finds of similar date from sites in regions as far apart as Mongolia and Kuban (cats 176–77, 180). Some stylistic details, such as the cylindrical eyes and mouth, had been known in the region as early as the preceding late Bronze Age, as they occur on objects of the Karasuk culture. Animals on these early depictions had larger heads in proportion to the body, while the body and legs were much shorter. Over time the head–body proportions became more harmonious and more realistic, and gradually evolved towards the more schematic and two-dimensional versions of later times. **LSM**





Arzhan-2

The burial mound of Arzhan-2 lies 8 km east of Arzhan-1 at the opposite end of a row of large burial mounds. It was excavated between 2000 and 2004 by a joint German–Russian expedition directed by Dr K. V. Chugunov, Dr H. Parzinger and Dr A. Nagler, and the results proved highly important for understanding many details of early Scythian burial in the Tuva region (fig. 58).<sup>19</sup>

This area had been occupied during the Bronze Age and was later reused as a necropolis in the early Scythian period. The burial mound consisted of a 2-m-high circular flat-topped platform of stone slabs measuring 80 m across. This was sealed by a thick layer of clay and the slanting stone sides were secured by a stone ring wall. On the eastern edge was a series of stone slabs with rock art (cats 29–30). Near the centre of the burial mound lay two empty rectangular pits measuring up to 5.5 m across and 2.5 m deep. The main tomb (grave 5) was placed in the north-west part of the complex. It lay in a rectangular pit and consisted of inner and outer wooden chambers with separate flat roofs and interlocking log walls, the innermost of which was lined with felt and had a plank floor covered with black felt (fig. 59). So-called ‘wiggle matching’ of calibrated radiocarbon dates and dendrochronological studies give a seventh-century BC date for this construction, and study of the wood and tree rings shows that all the wood was larch, the trees were between 90 and 120 years old when they were felled, mostly in autumn or winter, and differential growth patterns suggest that more than one copse was exploited. This grave was unrobbed and contained as many as 9,300 objects, of which 5,600 were gold, mostly tiny appliquéés. In the centre were two skeletons lying beside each other, one a man aged forty to fifty years and the other a woman aged thirty to thirty-five (fig. 61).



Fig. 58  
View of Arzhan-2 during excavation.

Fig. 59  
View of the double-log roof of grave 5.

Fig. 60  
Cranium of a young woman with multiple pointed battle-axe injuries.

Fig. 61  
View of the intact contents of grave 5.

Fig. 62  
Detail of horse burials with partially preserved horse gear *in situ*.



Both originally wore richly decorated clothing and were clearly of equally high status: the appearance of this clothing has been carefully reconstructed from the *in situ* position of the appliquéés as the actual cloth had perished, and is discussed further in Chapter 4. The man was interred with a heavily decorated dagger on his right thigh but his pointed battle-axe (cat. 134), whip and bow case (cat. 123) were found in the north-east corner. Other finds in this chamber were amber beads, a wooden drinking cup with a gold-leaf covered handle, a wooden comb with gold foil overlay, a small bronze vessel inside a leather pocket, stone incense burners, and grains and fruits, including wild cherry.

Other graves were found beneath the platform. These were mostly stone-lined and roofed cists orientated north-west/south-east and generally containing a single crouched body on its left side, with his or her head to the north-west. The men were buried on the eastern side, the women on the north-west, and they might have been the attendants of the royal couple. In some cases there were clear signs of how they died: a young woman in grave 22 had been killed by blows of a pointed battle-axe to the back and front of her head (fig. 60), and a fifty- or sixty-year-old man in grave 24 had been dispatched with a club. The headgear of a royal riding horse was interred in its own special grave, and in the south-west part a row of fourteen bridled horses was buried at a late stage of the funerary ritual (fig. 62); genetic research shows that they came from different herds.<sup>20</sup> Finally, as many as 200 stone circles around this burial mound contained burnt offerings. **KVC, HP, AN**





‘Deer stone’

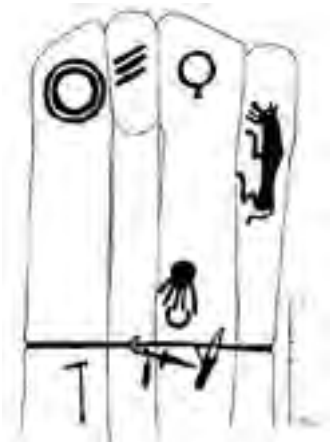
During the ninth to sixth centuries BC, different regions of Eurasia developed their own monumental art style in the form of decorated stone stelae, now called ‘deer stones’ as the surfaces are sometimes covered by images of deer. These were the focal point of cult centres in Altai-Sayan, including the sites of Arzhan, Yustyd and Sagly. Some, such as this example, also represent generalized images of warriors.<sup>21</sup>

The upper part shows a schematic head with three diagonal lines in place of the face. The wide sides have flared earrings and two rings carved at the top. On other stelae the conical earrings resemble those found at Arzhan-2 (cat. 68), as well as other burial mounds in Tuva, Kazakhstan, Altai and Volga. Other deer stones have the top or centre of the stone carved with solar or lunar symbols. The back shows a panther or leopard with circular eye, upright ears, open mouth, curved body, long tail and folded legs. This is typical as deer stones usually have a depiction of a hoofed animal (deer, elk,

horse, goat, sheep, ox, boar) and predator (panther, leopard, wolf, dog) at this point. The left side has a circle with five radiating lines carved above the belt, and a semicircle representing a crescent moon beneath. Below that is a buckled belt with a suspended dagger, whetstone, bow and quiver, and pointed battle-axe. In other cases a sword, shield or mirror are also shown. The belt signifies more than just an everyday item of wear and represents the zone of transition between the middle and the lower worlds. These stelae therefore not only represent a schematic image of a male warrior, but also form part of the complex world view of the ancient nomadic tribes: the top includes solar or lunar symbols symbolizing the heavens, the main part has anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs and the lower portion represents the underworld. Most of the stelae have a bevelled top corner shorter on the east and taller on the west, thus perhaps connected with the sunrise and sunset, and these figures may have been aligned accordingly. **LSM**

Stone  
H. 110, W. 22, D. 12 cm  
Arzhan village, Piy-Khem region, Tuva  
(expedition of L. S. Marsadolov, 1989)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2830/23

Fig. 63  
Tuva: drawing of a stone stela from the Arzhan settlement, eighth century BC  
From the materials of the archaeological expedition organized by the State Hermitage





Rock art with depictions of elks and Bactrian camels

As many as fifteen stone slabs erected around the eastern section of the stone ring wall surrounding the Arzhan-2 burial mound were decorated with rock art. Judging from their style, they date to approximately the same period as the older burial mound, Arzhan-1, but some may be older. They had been deliberately placed on this side as the mound was the easternmost in a row of platform mounds, and they would therefore have been the first items to be seen by any visitors coming from the east. This already broken slab shows elks and two-humped or Bactrian camels. Both occur in 'Animal Style' art and are the largest herbivores in the region. This type of camel was already domesticated in Central Asia as early as the third millennium BC, and was used as a source of traction. They were also highly valued for their capacity to carry substantial loads, as a Bactrian camel can carry as much as 250 kg. Their thick, shaggy coats enable them to withstand severe cold and provide hair, and they are a source of nutritious milk and a substantial amount of meat. **KVC**

Stone  
H. 100, W. 56 cm  
Pre-seventh century BC (secondary reuse in Arzhan-2 construction)  
Arzhan-2, Tuva (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2002)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/145

Fig. 64  
Drawing of cat. 29 showing elks and Bactrian camels.

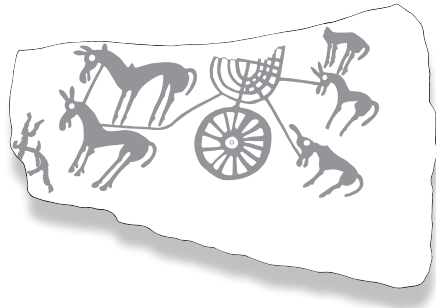


30  
Rock art with depictions of horses and a chariot

This slab is important as it shows a horse-drawn chariot with spoked wheels and three spare horses tethered behind. Unfortunately the top of the slab is missing, so we do not know the appearance of the chariot cab. Petroglyphs with chariots such as this are rather common in Eurasia and are usually dated to the Bronze Age, but the style of the horses suggests a later (early Scythian) date and indicates the continuity of tradition. The purpose of the chariots is uncertain: previously of military use, they may have continued as ritual vehicles in a period dominated by horsemen. **KVC**

Stone  
H. 67, W. 97 cm  
Pre-seventh century BC (secondary reuse in Arzhan-2 construction)  
Arzhan-2, Tuva (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2002)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/141

Fig. 65  
Drawing of cat. 30 showing depictions of horses and a chariot.





# The rock art of Central Asia

The enormous Central Asian Altai mountains cross the modern borders between present-day Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China. They are unsuitable for agriculture but for a long time were the territory of hunters and pastoralists. Following the last glacial period, during the Holocene epoch, these ancient people inhabited the high-altitude valleys and plateaux, and left engraved and pecked images on rocks and cliffs (figs 66–68). Known as petroglyphs, these form a huge open-air art gallery.<sup>22</sup> They represent an important part of the world corpus of rock art, known from other parts of the world from the Palaeolithic period onwards. Within the Altai region both local and international archaeologists and art historians have recorded countless examples of petroglyphs, as well as ancient burial sites. The corpus of drawings and photographs of rock images is now enormous and published in a large number of volumes and series in China, Mongolia, Russia, France, Korea and the United States. A number of rock art sites in the Mongolian Altai have also recently been added to the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

These unique traces of ancient societies in archaeological landscapes have not changed much over the centuries. They illustrate an enormous number of animal images, including deer, goats, bulls, horses and wild boar, as well as rich



Fig. 66  
Rock art in Khakassia.



Figs 67–68  
Deer and other wild animals depicted  
on a rock face, Dzhalgys-Tobe, Altai.

compositions that include figures, scenes of hunting or combat, chariots and even caravans. Images belonging to Chalcolithic hunters of the sixth to third millennium BC and Bronze Age pastoral tribes of the third and second millennia BC are the most common and most detailed, and provide a great deal of information. The images of the later periods belonging to Scythian or early Iron Age nomads from the first millennium BC and Turkic nomads of the fifth century AD and later are perhaps less numerous, but nevertheless include very important representations of stylized animals and various compositions. These petroglyphs are broadly datable either because of the details included, such as pointed battle-axes or bow cases, or by stylistic comparison.

The location of petroglyphs, often near passes, fords and cemeteries, was carefully selected in order to mark territorial boundaries, define sacred and ritual landscapes, and display the social prestige of local elites. Some scholars interpret rock art as a manifestation of Siberian shamanism, which survives up to the present day, but such a hypothesis is not well supported and, particularly for pre-Turkic periods, other beliefs and mythologies seem to correspond more closely to these images. **H-PF**



## 4 Personal appearance





# Personal appearance

E. V. Stepanova & S. V. Pankova

The Sacae, who are Scythians, had on their heads tall caps, erect and stiff and tapering to a point; they wore breeches, and carried their native bows, and daggers, and axes withal, which they call ‘sagaris’. These were Amyrgian Scythians, but were called Sacae; for that is the Persian name for all Scythians.<sup>1</sup>

Written sources, notably Herodotus, pay detailed attention to Scythian rituals and their heroic adventures, but only give a general description of their appearance or clothing. Describing the Massagetae, who lived east of the Caspian Sea, and whose clothes and lifestyle were not unlike those of the Scythians, Herodotus simply states that ‘gold is the adornment of their headgear and belts and girdles’.<sup>2</sup> The Persian sources distinguish between three types of Scythian, whom they called *Sakā*: the *Sakā haumavargā* (‘haoma-drinking *Sakā*’) who may be the same as the ‘Amyrgian Scythians’ referred to by Herodotus, the *Sakā tigraxaudā* (‘*Sakā* with pointed caps’) and the seemingly western *Sakā tayai paradraya* (‘*Sakā* beyond the sea’).<sup>3</sup>



Unfortunately objects made of organic materials do not usually survive outside the exceptional conditions of the Altai region, and realistic images of people are not typical for Scythian art. However, valuable information can be gathered from representations by Greek and Achaemenid craftsmen who had contact with the nomads around the Black Sea and Central Asia. There are images of ‘Scythians’ on silver and gold vessels from the Black Sea area and the Greek mainland, although these may well be somewhat fantastic and depict a generalized ‘barbarian’ character, as well as in Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis and Bisitun (figs 69–70).

In each case, the Scythians and other ‘barbarian’ peoples described by or shown on contemporary Achaemenid and Chinese sources have Caucasian facial features. It is probably because of this that neither Greek nor Achaemenid sources use negative characteristics, such as ‘horrid’ or ‘monstrous’, when referring to the Scythians, whereas later authors used such terms when commenting on the Mongoloid ethnic appearance of the nomadic

Fig. 69  
Scythian delegation depicted on the east facade of the Apadana at Persepolis, 1935. Joseph Lindon Smith (1863–1950). Dry brush oil with canvas. H. 89, W. 188 cm. Oriental Institute, Chicago



Fig. 70  
A delegation of Scythians carrying a short sword (*akinakes*), armlets and pointed battle-axes are represented on the north facade of the Apadana at Persepolis. Fifth century BC. The faces of these figures were later defaced in antiquity.

Fig. 71  
Detail of gilt silver amphora from Chertomlyk showing a Scythian man with off-the-shoulder jacket. Fourth century BC. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 863 1/166

Huns who invaded the European steppe a thousand years later.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese records of the first century BC emphasize the red hair and blue eyes of the nomads on the northern and western borders of the then Chinese state.<sup>5</sup> The iconographic and textual evidence is confirmed by anthropological and genetic research, which suggests the peoples of the ancient steppe and forest-steppe, including the Scythians, had Indo-European origins. Of course, individual tribes of Scythians were not uniform; this has led to long and intense academic discussion over their origins and connections. For example, the study of western Scythian groups appears to indicate predominantly local origins among the forest-steppe population, but foreign, and specifically Central Asian, origins for the Scythians of the steppe who were closest to the Bronze Age population. Anthropological data suggest that the core of the northern Black Sea Scythian population was genetically linked with an Indo-Iranian branch that migrated from Europe to the east, reaching Central Asia during the Bronze Age, and then in the early Iron Age returned to the northern Black Sea steppe.<sup>6</sup> The Asian Scythian population, especially those living in the Altai-Sayan region, was even more mixed than the European Scythians, even within a given tribe. For example, judging by the surviving human remains, a number of the Pazyryk chieftains had pronounced Mongoloid features, while the women



who accompanied them were of Europoid type.<sup>7</sup> The local population of the Pazyryk tribes contain some Mongoloid traits, such as the shape of the skull, that can be genetically linked with the much earlier Bronze Age communities of the Okunevo culture of southern Siberia.<sup>8</sup>

The environmental and economic context affected nomadic costume and way of life. Clothing needed to be suited to a pastoral lifestyle, constant riding and the surrounding environment. The vast territories inhabited by the Scythian nomads covered diverse climates and landscapes: steppe-mountain valleys with pronounced continental climate to the east (Altai-Sayan and Kazakhstan) and the vast steppe to the west (in the Black Sea and Ural regions). The frozen burial mounds of Pazyryk in the Altai mountains provide exceptional preservation of the physical appearance and costume of the individuals buried here, as well as many other aspects of their lifestyle as discussed in the following chapters, and this information can be compared with contemporary representations, nomadic imagery and recent ethnographic data.

On balance, there is more evidence for men’s costume. As shepherds and soldiers they spent most of their lives in the open air, often on horseback, which meant their clothes had to be warm, comfortable and practical. The Pazyryk burial mounds and Greek representations of Scythians show the same types of clothing, which correspond





in both materials and style: a coat, with fur or wool worn on the inside and most often probably sheepskin, secured around the waist with a belt and worn with wool or fine-leather trousers and soft boots. A detail on a gilt silver amphora from Chertomlyk shows a fur jacket worn over the naked chest of a Scythian (fig. 71). The same can be seen among the common Pazyryk soldiers and even chieftains, except that these chieftains' jackets tend to be longer and resemble short coats, are made of more expensive furs, such as sable, squirrel and stoat, and are lavishly decorated. This minimalist dress style is confirmed by ethnographic data. In hot weather or when working, the fur jacket would be taken down off the right or both shoulders, but in winter warmer and longer versions of the same style would be worn where available.<sup>9</sup>

Felt stockings were another dress feature that was very popular throughout the Asiatic region and worn by men and women. They are found in numerous Pazyryk burial mounds as well as burials in Xinjiang. They are shown on Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis among the gifts brought by the *Sakā*, a bronze mounted archer on a brazier found at Almaty (fig. 72) and a miniature bronze figure from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (fig. 73). Felt stockings were worn until quite recently by Kazakhs, Tuvans and Kyrgyz, and their use may reflect the harsher continental climate of Central Asia, as opposed to that of the Black Sea region. This might also account for the differences in footwear.



The footwear depicted in the Black Sea region, whether on plaques or precious metal vessels, is tied low on the calf with leather straps, and stockings are absent (cats 119, 205). In contrast, all the boots found in Altai burial mounds, whether for women, men or children, are taller and reach at least up to the knee. These boots were made from leather and fur, and stitched like the felt stockings, as they were gathered at the toe with a separately sewn smaller sole. As leather is not as flexible as felt, the calves and toecaps of the boots were made separately, the connecting seam covered with a decorative leather strip or red lace and a thicker leather sole attached beneath.

Two unusual coats were found in mound 3 at Pazyryk. These are extremely bulky felt 'raincoats' with hoods, worn over other clothing and even covering personal weapons.<sup>10</sup> The better preserved of these measured 1 m from collar to hem, 1.2 m wide across the shoulders and 1.4 m at the hem, and had long wide sleeves. Based on the material, size and style, as well as such details as the straps, paired slits at the back and a detachable hood, this garment is almost identical to the traditional Tuvan raincoats (*khevenek*) worn over other clothes in poor weather.<sup>11</sup> First recorded at a Pazyryk site from the third century BC, this type of garment became popular among other nomadic tribes far beyond southern Siberia. It is clear that it was used not only while hunting or herding but also during military campaigns, as they are mentioned by later written sources, and both the Byzantines and Persians borrowed heavily from their steppe adversaries. According to the

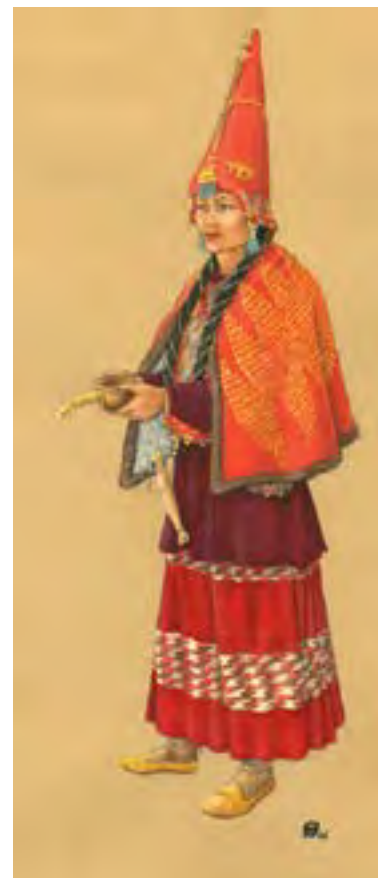
Fig. 72  
Bronze brazier found at Samal,  
Almaty.  
National Museum of the  
Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana

Fig. 73  
Bronze archer figure from the  
Siberian Collection.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Z-548

Fig. 74  
Reconstruction of the 'royal' man  
or chieftain from the main tomb  
at Arzhan-2.



Fig. 75  
Reconstruction of the 'royal'  
woman from the main tomb  
at Arzhan-2.



military manual known as the *Strategikon*, compiled by the Byzantine emperor and veteran campaigner Maurice (AD 582–602), cavalry:

should also be provided with an extra-large cloak or hooded mantle of felt with broad sleeves to wear, large enough to wear over their armament, including the coat of mail and the bow. Then, in case it should rain or be damp from dew, by wearing this garment over the coat of mail and the bow they may protect their armament and still not find it awkward to use the bow or the lance. Such cloaks are also necessary in another way on patrol, for when the mail is covered by them, its brightness will not be seen at a distance by the enemy, and they also provide some protection against arrows.<sup>12</sup>

Functional and practical, these felt raincoats continued to be used by horseback herders in Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Tuva up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The emergence of horse riding is linked by some researchers to the invention of trousers, the earliest examples of which were discovered at the burial sites of the herder population of Xinjiang, and date to about the turn of the first millennium BC.<sup>13</sup> These are real trousers where the legs and crotch were created as a single item, rather than the tie-on leggings worn in Europe as early as the Neolithic period, judging by the find of 'Ötzi' in the Italian alps in 1991. Perhaps because of the heavy looting of elite Altai burial mounds, fragmentary leather trousers have only been found in the first Tuekta burial mound (cat. 50). However, the excavations of graves of common nomads on the Ukok plateau have produced several pairs of red woollen trousers.<sup>14</sup> These were tucked into long felt stockings and worn with leather or fur boots. The chieftain from the main burial at Arzhan-2 wore more elaborate trousers embroidered with gold beads. None of the organic objects from this burial survive, hence the main material of these trousers is unknown, but they were probably wool or leather.<sup>15</sup>

A regular accessory of male warriors was a belt, or two belts, to which their personal weapons were attached. These belts were decorated with fastenings of different materials depending on the wearer's rank and could be gold, bronze, bone or wood.

The chieftain from Arzhan-2 wore three belts, decorated with gold fastenings (fig. 74). One suspended a chisel and whip and measured 170 cm, based on the position of the fastenings, and had a long tassel dangling at the front, similar to those depicted on Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis (see fig. 69). The second, so-called 'archer's belt', was intended for the quiver and the bow case. Considering the number of gold fastenings and their spacing, the belt must have measured 190 cm long. It was therefore necessary to wrap it around the waist twice, with the ends secured with a buckle, which also served as a quiver ring. These two belts were positioned to the side of the body and the clothing was secured with a simple sash, which also supported a dagger, a whetstone and possibly a satchel. This sash may have been leather or cloth, as in the accompanying burials.<sup>16</sup> Along with its primary function, the nomadic warrior's belt was a sign of status.

Women's dress is less clear, but the position of appliques in burials such as Arzhan-2 gives hints of their appearance (fig. 75). More importantly, the first burial mound at Ak-Alakha-3, on the Ukok plateau in the Altai mountain region, revealed an undisturbed female mummy (see pp. 100–101). The frozen embalmed corpse was wearing a long, wide tunic made of wild (probably Indian) silk, a skirt made from horizontal strips of woollen cloth and tied with a braided belt, long felt stockings and a fur coat (fig. 78).<sup>17</sup> Similar women's dress has been recorded at Pazyryk-2, where two cotton tunics, very alike in style and perhaps also Indian (cat. 232), were found with the scraps of one or more skirts made of horizontal strips and two pairs of felt stockings with multicoloured appliqué over the upper hem (cat. 51). Boots were worn over the stockings and a second pair had been placed in the coffin. The burial dress set included a squirrel-fur coat or cape decorated with openwork strips of leather appliqué and gilded bronze plaques. The coat was trimmed with black foal hair and a strip of magenta-coloured fur. In both cases the tunics were of expensive imported cloth, available only to women from the elite. Similar woollen items found with burials of the Tarim basin may belong to a related population.

Skirts made of horizontal coloured strips of cloth, either woven or braided, appear to be a common feature of the central Asian nomads. Fragments have





been found in Altai and the Arzhan-2 burial mound in Tuva.<sup>18</sup> Numerous multicoloured skirts of woven and braided strips of various width, tied with braided cords with tassels and felt baubles, have also been found in first-millennium BC burials in the Tarim basin (cats 45–46).<sup>19</sup> Braided wool items – from horses’ bridles to clothing – were especially typical of the nomadic herder cultures of Central Asia.

Nomad women often wear trousers, since anything else would impede their horseback lifestyle, but the question of whether Scythian women also wore trousers is not as simple as it first appears. Nomadic women were constantly in the saddle, and they too were buried with their horses when they died. The so-called ‘rider complex’ – the pronounced indentation on the bones of the lower limbs (pelvis, hips, tibial bones, where the foot-moving muscles connect to the bone) – caused by regular and frequent riding has been found on around 40% of all male and 10% of female skeletons, predominantly of thirty-five years of age or more.<sup>20</sup> That nomadic women rivalled their male counterparts at horseback riding is known from ancient authors and later travellers, and ethnographic sources noted the lack of distinction between male and female nomadic

dress. Depictions of Amazons, a popular subject on ancient Greek vases and reliefs, often portray them in tight-fitting jackets and trousers tucked into low boots. At the same time, Herodotus cited the Amazons’ description of themselves as being distinct from Scythian women, as they themselves ‘shoot with the bow and throw the javelin and ride, but the crafts of women we have never learned; and your women do none of the things whereof we speak, but abide in their wagons working at women’s crafts, and never go abroad a-hunting or for aught else’.<sup>21</sup> Considering that the Scythians are allegedly thought not to have recognized the Amazons as women but ‘supposed them to be men all of the same age’ until they stripped the corpses after battle,<sup>22</sup> it is reasonable to assume Scythian women had distinguishing garments. In this context, it is interesting to note that the mummies in the Subashi-3 burial in the Tarim basin wore long woollen trousers under their skirts.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the Scythian herder tribeswomen wore both types of garment and exactly what was worn, and when, may have depended on their age or the occasion.

Other garments reflected prestige rather than function; these were borrowed by the nomads from the upper social ranks of their sedentary neighbours. A good example of this is the Iranian *kandys* robe, a form of coat with narrow sleeves that was worn slung over the shoulders like a cape and which parallels the richly decorated fur clothing found in the large Pazyryk burial mounds (fig. 76). The closest to the Iranian prototypes is the stout fur ‘robe’ from the Katandin burial mound, which was lavishly decorated with colourful leather appliqué and sewn-on square plaques overlaid with gold foil.<sup>24</sup> Narrow decorative sleeves were also a feature of the man’s squirrel-fur coat from Pazyryk-2 (cat. 47), while wider sewn-up sleeves were found on a man’s sable coat from the same burial. A fragmentary narrow leather sleeve with openwork leather appliqué covered in gold foil from Tuekta-1 shows that such garments continued throughout the entire span of the Pazyryk culture (cat. 49). Clothes like these could have been used in both everyday and ceremonial occasions.

Headdresses deserve a separate comment. The Scythian nomads had two popular styles. One was a circular bonnet-like hat with ‘ears’, either long

Fig. 76  
Achaemenid gold statuettes from the Oxus Treasure showing two men wearing long decorated gowns. Gold. H. 5,3 and 5,6 cm. Fifth century BC. British Museum, London, 1897,1231.2.a and 1897,1231.2 Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks



**OPPOSITE, TOP**  
Fig. 77  
Physical reconstruction of man's dress from Issyk. National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana

**OPPOSITE, BOTTOM**  
Fig. 78  
Reconstruction of woman's dress from Ak-Alakha-3.

**BELOW**  
Figs 79–80  
Reconstructions of woman's clothing from Pazyryk-2.



ears tied under the chin or short ears with straps to attach the ends; the hat had a leather outer layer and a felt lining. This type was intended for everyday use. The second type had an elongated and almost triangular top and was worn by Black Sea Scythians, the Asiatic *Sakā* and the Siberian nomads. The shape and detail of this headgear varied between different ethnic groups, and changed over time; thus, for instance, the headdress of the chieftains from the Issyk burial mound in present-day Kazakhstan (fig. 77) differs significantly from those found at Pazyryk-2. The unifying feature of the male headdress in the Asiatic nomad cultures was an animal- or bird-shaped crest, with symmetrical representations of hooved animals on either side (cats 36–37).

Hairstyles varied. Scythian nomads sported different styles, which may have belonged to local fashions or ethnic preferences. In many Greek representations Scythian men are shown bearded and long-haired, just like the *Sakā* on Achaemenid reliefs, but the physical anthropological evidence from mummified heads and preserved hair in the Altai region shows that Pazyryk people were clean-shaven, shaved around their foreheads, cut their hair and wore braids. At the same time, the large felt hanging found in mound 5 at Pazyryk depicts a horseman with a moustache and a short haircut (fig. 110). Men with moustaches and haircuts also appear on gold belt plaques from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great, including the famous ‘under the tree scene’ and another showing a boar hunt (cats 15, 22). Imagery from the Black Sea region also shows Scythians with their hair tied with straps, and men, women and children in the Altai region wore wooden, bone or leather diadems.

Pazyryk women wore elaborate wigs over their shaven heads (cat. 40). Judging by the wig found in the first burial mound at Ak-Alakha-3, these were complex structures made of different materials (fig. 78). The felt cap-base was readied with a specially prepared malleable paste and supported an elaborate horsehair hairstyle; this was surmounted by a tall leaf- or feather-shaped crest, up to 60 cm in height, made of a wooden frame covered with felt and cloth. The crest was decorated with leather cutouts in the shape of birds, which were covered in gold foil. A strand of horsehair from the crown

of the head was wrapped in felt and placed in a knitted woollen hair-case (cat. 41); this in turn had a wooden-headed pin in the shape of a deer standing on a ball. The entire structure was decorated at the base with a wooden aigrette in the shape of a deer (fig. 79). The symbolism of the female wig decorations may be linked with the tree of life, with birds in its branches and beasts at its roots.<sup>25</sup> The composition of the wooden decorations in the exceptionally preserved burials at Pazyryk and other Altai sites allows us to speculate that female wig-headdresses, similar to the one described above, were worn by all Pazyryk women. Long pins with crests were also part of the headdress of the ‘queen’ at Arzhan-2 in Tuva, but its precise appearance is uncertain.<sup>26</sup> The wig-headdresses of Altai were topped with a felt cone with a thin tail, around 70–80 cm tall (fig. 80), resembling those in women’s burials of Xinjiang.

A final word should be said about tattooing. This is not a modern phenomenon but was widely practised among Eurasian tribes, and there is growing evidence for it from ancient Egypt and other places where preservation allows the human skin to survive.<sup>27</sup> Herodotus refers to how Thracians of the lower Danube ‘consider tattooing a mark of high birth, the lack of it a mark of low birth’.<sup>28</sup> Ancient writers do not specifically refer to it in connection with Scythians, but the Greek philosopher Clearchus of Soli, writing in the fourth century BC, described the cruelty of the Scythians, with accounts of Scythian women using pins to tattoo the bodies of their western Thracian counterparts. This led to the Thracian women tattooing the rest of their bodies in an attempt to use beauty to erase their humiliation.<sup>29</sup> The first-century BC Roman geographer Pomponius Mela collected the works of earlier Greek authors in his *Description of the World* and reported that the Agathirs, western neighbours of the Black Sea Scythians, would ‘paint their faces and their bodies ... with the same images, and ones that won’t come off’.<sup>30</sup> Fifth-century BC Greek pottery occasionally depicts women who are usually thought to be Amazons or Thracians who have patterns on their skin.<sup>31</sup> None of the eastern Scythian sites have yet revealed any tools for tattooing, nor are there any clear images from that region of people with tattooed skin, and although multiple Chinese

sources from different periods mention barbaric tribes practising the art of tattoos, none of these can be reliably identified as Scythian.

However, mummies preserved in the frozen burials of the Altai mountains confirm tattooing was practised on bodies of both genders. Moreover, this practice extended from high society, as evidenced by the elite tombs at Pazyryk, to lower ranks and common people, judging by finds from Ak-Alakha-3 and Verkh-Kal'dzhin-2.<sup>32</sup> The tattoos on the chieftain's body from mound 2 at Pazyryk (cats 32–33) and the two mummies from Ukok were recognized during excavation. The skin of the other three mummies – the woman from mound 2 at Pazyryk, and the man and woman from mound 5 at Pazyryk – was initially too dark to distinguish any marks, but tattoos were discovered recently through infrared photography. The material used was dark, and was probably soot, as this is both sterile and easy to acquire. What may be a tattooing set (an iron knife, bone needle and spoon, pestle, stone palette and mirror) was found in a Scythian burial at Filippovka-I in the southern Ural region.<sup>33</sup> It is instructive to note that recent Arctic tattoo artists were women whose 'extensive training as skin seamstresses (parkas, pants, boots, hide boat covers, etc.) facilitated their precision when stitching the human skin with tattoos ... On St Lawrence Island, a woman's tattoo kit consisted invariably of a bone needle, sinew thread, and lamp-black mixed with urine, graphite or lubricating seal oil.'<sup>34</sup>

The majority of the Pazyryk tattoos are depictions of animals (fig. 81). Some are fantastic compositions combining features of hoofed animals with predators, birds and beasts. Notable are large figures with the body and legs of a hoofed animal, the head of a bird of prey, a long tail and antlers, with small bird heads on the tips of the branches. Other images appear naturalistic and depict horses, wild asses, mountain sheep, roe deer and feline predators (fig. 82), as well as cockerels and wading birds (fig. 83). On the whole, the tattoos tend to have similar imagery to the costume, horse gear and coffins from Pazyryk burials. Like these felt, leather and wood objects, the tattoos mainly show animal contest scenes that explore the idea of rebirth through death. This was one of the most important ideological themes of the nomadic cultures and underlies all



Fig. 82  
Tattoo of feline predator on the left shoulder of the man from burial mound 5 at Pazyryk.



Fig. 83  
Tattoo of a cockerel on the right hand of the man from burial mound 5 at Pazyryk.



Fig. 84  
Tattoo of tigers and a leopard attacking elk from the right arm of the woman from burial mound 5 at Pazyryk.

**OPPOSITE**

Fig. 81  
Tattoos of a fantastic hoofed griffin on the right arm of the man from burial mound 2 at Pazyryk.  
State Hermitage, St Petersburg, 1684/298

Scythian 'Animal Style' imagery (fig. 84).<sup>35</sup> It is therefore clear that, in addition to their vivid decorative character, tattoos also possessed a deep symbolic meaning and probably took inspiration from local mythology, ideology and self-identity. The question of how individuals interpreted the images is less clear, as tattoos in traditional communities may be made for different reasons and under different circumstances. Historically, in some cultures tattoos carried a protective function or showed that the wearer belonged to a particular community, while their appearance, number and position on the body might reflect the wearer's status and achievements, and commemorate both personal and communal events. In other cases they were connected with the lifecycle rituals symbolizing the transition to a new age or social group. In yet other cases they were intended to reduce or eliminate pain, and this might explain the dotted pattern along the spine of the chieftain from the second Pazyryk burial mound, which resembles acupuncture.<sup>36</sup>



Pazyryk

The site of Pazyryk lies in a small valley near the Great Ulagan river in the high Altai mountain region of southern Siberia, 1,600 m above sea level and close to the present Chinese/Mongolian border. It is famous because of the exceptional preservation of organic remains in five large burial mounds discovered in 1924 by S. I. Rudenko and excavated by him over four seasons in 1929, 1947/48, 1948 and 1949 (figs 85–88). Each tomb consisted of a log-built chamber containing log coffins, usually with a man and woman inside each, and accompanied by a rich selection of everyday items placed around them. The tomb interiors were originally lined with plain and patterned felts. The piled corpses of horses with a rich variety of tack lay in a grave pit outside each tomb. These spectacular finds are discussed at greater length below.

Until very recently there has been no significant change in the climate between Scythian and modern periods in the Altai mountains. The winters are harsh but the short summers are ideally suited to pastoral nomadism, as the sub-alpine high plateaux are perfect for grazing. Scabious flowers and moss shoots in the roofs of the tombs proves that they were constructed in late June or July. All the tomb chambers had been robbed in antiquity, the bodies desecrated and many of the felts ripped down. However, the permanent refrigeration of the contents allowed textiles, furs, leather and felt to survive, along with the actual bodies of the individuals and of their horses outside (see figs 149–51). The icy conditions were caused by the freezing of rainwater in the subsoil, which was prevented from defrosting in summer because of the density of the burial mound above, a process known as mound congelation. The robbers were forced to cut through the ice and in some cases snapped the items frozen *in situ* because they could not extract them. Rainwater and snow then poured into the looters’ holes, which, when excavated, formed an easily distinguishable dirty yellow layer of ice.

Since their discovery, the exact dating of these tombs has attracted considerable attention. Examination of the tree rings showed that the tombs covered only a 48-year period, with burial mounds 1 and 2 at the beginning, mound 4 in year 7, mound 3 in year 37 and mound 5 in year 48; the other two tombs could not be dated more precisely. The excavator initially thought the tombs dated to the fifth and fourth centuries BC on the basis of some parallels with Achaemenid art of Iran;<sup>37</sup> this was followed by a number of Near Eastern scholars. The possibility that some imported items, such as the famous carpet, were heirlooms cannot be discounted, but the parallels cited between

Figs 85–88  
Excavations in progress in 1948, with removal of logs in the grave shaft, melting the ice inside the tomb chamber and excavating inside the chamber of burial mound 2, and field conservation of the large felt hanging from burial mound 5 in 1949. Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture, St Petersburg, I-32710, I-32725, I-32741, I-33401

the carpet’s motifs and Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis are not entirely appropriate, as the latter lack riders and reddish spotted fallow deer are more characteristic of local fauna or the Caucasus. The procession of walking lions is, however, a more convincing Achaemenid import (cat. 223). Additionally, closely datable Chinese parallels from the late Warring States period suggest a mid-fourth- to early third-century BC date for the silk fragments from mounds 3 and 5 and the mirror from mound 6; this later dating is supported by more recent radiocarbon dates.<sup>38</sup> **sus**





Ak-Alakha-3

The site of Ak-Alakha lies on the Ukok plateau in the south-west Siberian Altai region. The area is 2,500 m above sea level, surrounded by mountains and close to the modern borders with Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia. This remote region was nonetheless used as winter pasture between late October and June, and the freezing conditions are excellent for the preservation of organic materials.

Archaeologists from Novosibirsk have been carrying out fieldwork here since 1990, and in 1993 an unrobbed burial mound of the Pazyryk culture was discovered for the first time in the Altai region. Two bodies lay in a small secondary chamber above the main tomb chamber: one was a twenty-five-year-old man who had suffered from spina bifida and had died from a blow to the back of the head; the other may have been a teenager. Both had been disturbed by later robbers who failed to realize that there was another tomb immediately below. They were accompanied by a row of three horses buried outside the northern tomb wall, all looking east and with their bridles and felt saddle-blankets intact: their legs appear to have been trussed and each had been killed with a pointed-battle-axe blow to the head. Plant residues found inside their stomachs showed that their last meal was sprouts of basket willow, which suggests that they died in summer: this is confirmed by the development of parasitic horse botfly (*Gasterophilus intestinalis*) found in their intestines, which indicates a more exact date of mid June.

Six more horses were buried at a deeper level; their number and the richness of their harness show that the primary burial belonged to a person of high status. Inside the unrobbed tomb chamber was a log coffin decorated with carved wood and leather appliqué; it contained the frozen body of a woman with tattooed

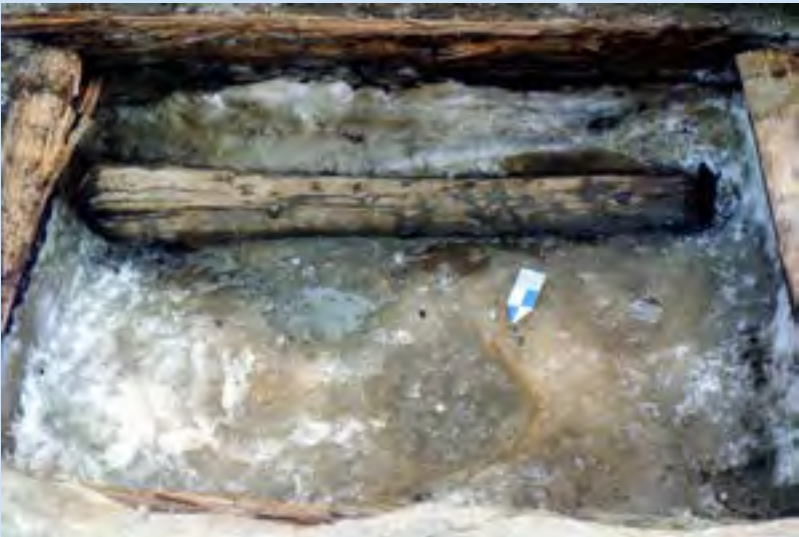


Fig. 89  
A view of the burial chamber and wooden coffin at Ak-Alakha-3 still filled with ice.

Fig. 90  
A fragment of leather appliqué in the form of a deer *in situ* in the frozen tomb at Ak-Alakha-3.



Fig. 91  
View of the Ukok plateau in summer.



arms showing intertwined mythical animals in combat. Popularly known as the ‘Ice Maiden’ or ‘Ukok Princess’, she had been laid on her right side and was wearing a repaired Chinese silk blouse over an ankle-length red and white striped woollen skirt, a long-sleeved outer garment and high felt boots decorated with gold. She also wore a tall composite wig decorated with tiny wooden birds, gold earrings, and a carved wooden torc representing a griffin and winged snow leopards. She was buried with a felt bag containing a silver mirror and some glass beads. Near her coffin were drinking vessels of pottery, wood and horn, and two low wooden tables that still had meat offerings and a knife placed on top.

Research shows that the woman was twenty-eight to thirty years old, about 1.54 m tall and had fair skin. Some years prior to her death she had developed breast cancer, and at a terminal stage of the disease she had suffered a very bad fall, probably from her horse: examination of the bones indicates that she fell on her right side and that her right arm must have been bound to the body. Bedsores imply that she had become bedridden, and the fact that death appears to have taken place several months before burial suggests that she died en route during the migration. This was why her body was mummified and her internal organs replaced with dry grass, wool and what appears to have been processed human tissue, which may have been intended to help her rebirth in another life. She must have been in considerable pain during her final years, and analysis of her hair shows significant traces of hemp, implying that it was burned not just for social reasons but also as a form of painkiller. **NP**



# Berel-11: a ‘frozen burial’ in the Kazakh Altai

The burial mound of Berel-11 lies in the eastern Kazakh portion of the Altai region. It was excavated between 1998 and 2000 under the direction of Prof. Z. Samashev and Prof. H.-P. Francfort as a joint team from the Institute of Archaeology of Kazakhstan (Almaty), the Central Asia Group of the French National Centre of Scientific Research (Nanterre) and the Centro Studi Ricerche Ligabue (Venice).<sup>39</sup> It is a large frozen mound dating from 294/293 BC exhibiting all the characteristics of the Pazyryk culture of the Altai known from earlier excavations at Pazyryk itself (see pp. 98–99), and later conducted on the Ukok plateau by the Institute of Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk (see pp. 100–101). The burial mound’s wooden funerary chamber and coffin had been looted in the past, but the remains of thirteen frozen horses complete with tack were found intact in the funerary pit outside. Some research is still in progress, especially on the techniques used to adorn the harnesses, most of which were carved from wood and decorated with gilding or tin foil. These finds are consistent with those from other Altai burial mounds, which we can now date more precisely through the use of radiocarbon dates and dendrochronological analyses. Some Berel finds match local Pazyryk culture, but others are related to Achaemenid art, as is explored below in Chapters 6 and 8. It appears that some objects were manufactured in the Altai but were greatly inspired by Achaemenid monumental and court arts. However, in order to be used according to the traditional demand and taste of the local elite, they were transformed into local forms by using raw materials from the steppe region and sophisticated local stylistic conventions. Surprisingly, this occurred during a late phase, several decades after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire itself. The art of the Berel-11 horse gear also needs to be understood in relation to the cultures of the surrounding areas and other arts, such as metallurgy and textiles. There was evidently a strong ancient and autonomous steppe art tradition. Thus this recent excavation allows not only a clearer understanding of the history of the Altai but also a better characterization of the role played by local early nomads in this process. A selection of these recent finds is exhibited here in London for the first time (cats 169, 219–22). **H-PF, ZS**

Fig. 92  
Burial mound at Berel-11 during excavation.

Fig. 93  
Tomb chamber inside the burial mound at Berel-11.



# Aymyrlyg

The large cemetery site of Aymyrlyg lies near the Yenisei river in the Tuva region of southern Siberia. It was first explored in 1964 by M. H. Mannai-ool and later excavated by an expedition from the Institute for the History of Material Culture in St Petersburg between 1968 and 1984, directed first by A. M. Mandelshtam and then by E. U. Stambulnik.<sup>40</sup> The archive remains in the Institute for the History of Material Culture: the artefacts have been transferred to the State Hermitage Museum and the human remains are in the Kunstkamera. The site is important as it is one of the most extensively excavated in this region. It began to be used during the Bronze Age and the latest burials are as late as the eighteenth century, but a large proportion of the cemetery belongs to the late Scythian period, about the third century BC. There were two main types of burial, laid out in rows close to the river terrace. The first consisted of a rectangular wooden cabin constructed of logs or beams at the bottom of a deep pit; these were used over many years and contained as many as fifteen interments. The second consisted of rectangular cists built of stone slabs placed on edge: most were for individual burials but occasionally larger graves contained two or three bodies. The smaller



Fig. 94  
Cist grave at Aymyrlyg  
XXXI 5/18.



Fig. 95  
Cist grave at Aymyrlyg  
XXXI 8/14.

cists were generally for sub-adults and sometimes clustered near the log-cabin graves and larger cists. A small number of other grave types was found: some were stepped pits covered by stone cairns or lined with slabs; others were simple pits in the ground. Bodies were generally placed on their left side, their legs flexed and orientated towards the west, but there were enough variations to show that this was not universal, and some burials belonged to disarticulated skeletons of people who had died elsewhere, their defleshed remains brought here at a later date and carefully interred with the bones in roughly the correct anatomical position.

Most tombs had been robbed, and metal staining and remains of broken arrow shafts show that weapons and arrowheads were some of the items sought by the robbers. Enough remained to show that weapons and ‘Animal Style’ art items had been regularly placed as grave goods, but horse gear was rare and limited to a small number of bronze bits, bone cheekpieces and bone clasps belonging to bridles; these were placed, along with the skulls of horses, on the roofs of the log-house tombs. The weaponry included bronze and iron daggers, pointed battle-axes, and bronze and bone arrowheads; wooden arrowheads are thought to have been used for hunting for fur or birds. Knives, awls, pins, needles, combs, mirrors, incense burners and containers made of pottery, wood and birch bark were also present. Clothing was very rarely preserved in this cemetery, but the remains of belts and personal ornaments proved that the bodies were originally clothed. The human remains have been studied in detail and give a huge amount of information about the Scythian population,<sup>41</sup> as men, women and children were all present. Many men showed signs of fractured long bones consistent with violence and heavy falls, possibly through horse-riding accidents. There were also dramatic signs of weapon trauma and surgery. Twelve individuals, mostly men, had been killed by one or more blows to the head with a pointed battle-axe: the exact position implies this was in face-to-face combat and inflicted by right-handed adversaries. Three men died as a result of sword slash injuries, and one six-year-old child had had its throat cut before being decapitated. Traces of scalping were found on another man’s head, probably in order to obtain a trophy rather than as post-mortem body treatment. This may also explain the amputation of another man’s left forearm. **sus**



Fig. 96  
Double grave at Aymyrlyg X 4a.





Head of a man

The monumental structure of the burial and the high quality of grave goods suggest that this man, who was buried in the second burial mound at Pazyryk, may have been a clan chieftain. He was between fifty-five and sixty years old when he met a violent death, his head smashed by three blows, at the hand of an individual wielding a pointed Scythian battle-axe (compare cat. 134). His brow also shows traces of a sword blow, and his right temple has a cut, stitched with fine sinew, which may be the remains of an old wound. The head had also been scalped, and Herodotus describes how a northern tribe called the Issedones honoured their male ancestors by gilding their heads ‘after stripping off the hair and cleaning out the inside’.<sup>42</sup> The remaining hair had also been shaven off, perhaps for ease of post-mortem trepanation. The removal of one or more discs of bone from the skull in this way was widely practised in the ancient world, and the techniques involved scraping, grooving, boring and cutting or incising deep intersecting lines. In many cases there are signs of healing, so the intentions must have been medical or psychological, but in the present case the intention was to remove the brain tissue and replace it with soil, pine needles and larch cones as part of the embalming process. The custom of trepanation continued in this region, as there is evidence from Tashtyk cemeteries of the early centuries AD (cats 260–61).<sup>43</sup>

During embalming the body was eviscerated, its organs removed, and the cavity sewn up with sinew. Long shallow cuts were carefully made along the inside of legs and arms in order to insert the embalming solution (possibly salt) while not damaging the joints; these were then sewn up with sinew. The buttocks, legs, arms and shoulder area had deep perforations, about 1 cm across and possibly made with a knife to allow the injection of a preservative fluid into the muscle tissue.<sup>44</sup> The man’s head and skin had been saturated in a mixture of shellac and gum, with small amounts of oil and wax.<sup>45</sup> The scalped area of the head had been overlaid with a different patch of skin with hair, but only one seam, from the right to the left ear, remains as looters decapitated the corpse and hacked the body into pieces.

Anthropological analysis revealed the man’s apparent Mongoloid characteristics. He would have been 176 cm tall, of solid build, heavy towards the end of his life. His front teeth had been severely worn (they were about two thirds of the original length), the first bottom molar on the right never came in and as a result a baby tooth was still in place.<sup>46</sup> His body was covered in tattoos, clearly visible against the pale skin (cats 32–33). Unfortunately, after it was excavated in 1947 the body of the mummy could not be preserved, and only the head, hands, feet and tattooed skin have survived.

The embalming ritual was widely practised by the Scythians. Herodotus tells us that the Black Sea Scythians embalmed their deceased chieftains: ‘his body enclosed in wax, his belly cut open and cleansed and filled with cut marsh-plants and frankincense, and parsley and anise seed, and sewn up again’.<sup>47</sup> High-status burials from the Altai illustrate similar efforts. These include trepanation, removal of the internal organs and muscle tissue, use of preservatives and cosmetic procedures to keep the likeness of the deceased (sculpting fillers, use of solutions that minimize the decaying process). Different modes of embalming were used in different burial mounds.<sup>48</sup> Excavations on the Ukok plateau have revealed evidence of the simple embalming methods used for common people, whereas in the case of adults buried in the Scythian cemetery at Aymyrlyg in the Tuva region, there was considerable attention paid to deflesh and disarticulate the bodies, particularly to detach the upper and lower limbs, sever each leg in two and separate the forearms from the upper limbs.<sup>49</sup>

Embalming, as an important part of the Pazyryk funerary ritual, must have had both a practical and ideological basis. The former would have related to preserving the body until the funeral, as burials could only be carried out in the transitional seasons of spring and autumn, the ground in the Altai region being impossibly hard for grave digging in winter. The latter would have related to the ancient Altai notions of one’s fate in the afterlife depending on the condition of the body, and of the paths to eternal life. However, the deciding factor in the survival of the mummified bodies was the permafrost that developed under the stone burial mounds, in

the harsh climate of the Altai mountain region. The probability of these ‘ice lenses’ forming was in direct proportion to the scale of the individual burial mound. Most of the smaller Altai burial mounds showed no signs of the ice lenses and the common Pazyryk people only ‘found eternity’ in the frosty soil of the Ukok plateau. **EVS**

Human remains  
H. 25 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/297

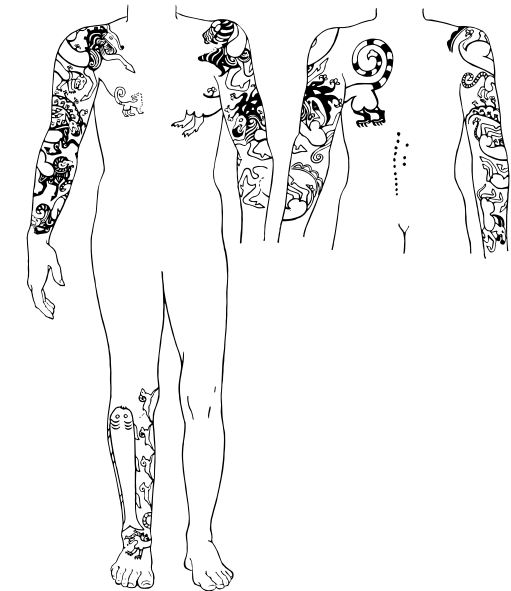
These tattoos are from the body of the fifty-five- to sixty-year-old mummified and frozen chieftain whose head is shown above (cat. 31). A considerable proportion of his body, namely both shoulders, both arms, part of the chest and the back, was covered with tattoos showing fantastic beasts, depicted in a very specific style. His clothing was removed when the tomb was looted in antiquity, and these tattoos were therefore immediately noticed during excavation. However, soon after the body was extracted from the ice, it began to decompose. For the purposes of study and preservation the body was dissected and the surviving portions of tattooed skin were conserved. The drawings made have been collected into a graphic reconstruction of the chieftain's tattooing.<sup>50</sup> Recent study of the Pazyryk mummies revealed previously unreadable images on the right wrist of the chieftain and his left shin. His face, like those of other Pazyryk mummies, is free of tattoos.

The fragments of tattooed human skin shown here come from the left side of the chest and left shoulder of the deceased. The first shows the image of a fantastic predator coiled around his left pectoral: the front part covers his chest, while the rear, hind legs and tail curve round to the back (fig. 97). The head of the beast did not survive, although it can be roughly reconstructed from similar images on his right hand. The positioning of this largest of the tattoos is similar to that of the tiger on the body of another Pazyryk chieftain who was buried half a century later in the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk (see fig. 82). Their position over the heart may not have been accidental, as we can assume some knowledge of this organ and the ideas and beliefs connected with it. Both chieftains have horse-like characters on their right arms, rows of smaller ruminants (sheep and goats) on their shins and cockerels on their thumbs. A certain order of tattoo positioning on the bodies of Pazyryks must have been established.

The second tattoo was cut post-mortem in order to extract muscle and organ tissue as part of the mummification process and then sewn together with sinew. Such seams run through many of the

Pazyryk tattoos and may suggest that by the time of death they had lost some of their original significance. The reconstructed image of this tattoo shows a fantastic beast combining features of different hoofed animals but with a bird's beak and whimsical antlers tipped with the heads of eagles. These are some of the largest among the tattoos and cover the hands and shoulders of most of the surviving mummies. These images are combined with those of predators and can be construed as a symbolic stylization of an animal combat scene.

Tattooed images of hoofed griffins are similar to those shown on objects from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. However, during the Scythian period they were very widely represented in the region stretching from northern China to the Caucasus, albeit with many iconographic variations. The horses placed in Pazyryk burials must have been intended to resemble these mythical beasts because of their elaborate horned masks and other horse gear. As well as eagle heads, their antlers may have had predators or hoofed animals, as can be seen on bronze ornaments of north Caucasian horse tack, or the overlay on wooden dishes from the Filippovka burial mounds of the Urals.<sup>51</sup> Appearing as a key figure of cosmological myth, along with the fantastic eagle and predator, the griffin was both ancestor and prey, the dying and the reviving god and mediator, and united all levels of the Scythian cosmos. The main subjects of the Pazyryk tattoos are typical of the local fauna, as well as Scythian art in a more general sense. These fantastical predators, hoofed animals and fish are creatures of the middle and the lower worlds. The total absence of fantastic eagles is notable, but the fact that the headgear of both men and women only depicted eagles and fantastic hoofed beasts with birdlike traits (cats 36–37) points to separate imagery on the head and body. It is typical to see fish being placed at the very bottom, as on the shin of the man from the second Pazyryk burial mound, where, being a deep-sea dweller, it rightly belongs. **EVS, SVP**



Human remains with tattoos on the left upper arm, side of the chest and back of a man  
H. 49, W. 35 cm; H. 54  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/299–300

Fig. 97  
Reconstruction drawing showing the extent of the tattoos on the man from Pazyryk-2.



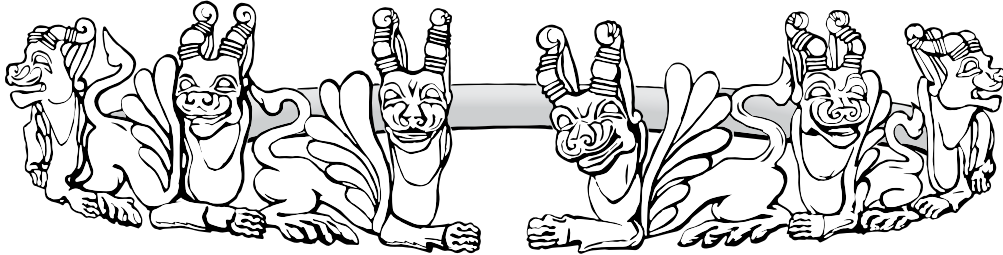


**Torc of copper tube with terminals in the form of six horned and winged lions (horn) with removable heads (wood)**

This torc was found at the head of the man's coffin in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk, but had been badly damaged when the tomb was looted. It consists of a hollow copper tube bent into a ring with the ends carved from wood and horn, then covered with gold overlays, to represent three pairs of winged, horned and hoofed lions ('lion griffins') shown in crouching position with their heads turned to the viewer (fig. 98). The heads were made separately, carved from wood in the round, with rounded antlers. The torc was originally covered in gold foil but this had been ripped off by the looters.

Torcs made like this from copper tubes or rods with openwork wooden or bone terminals and covered in gold leaf have been found in many Pazyryk culture burial mounds, and were a common element of funerary rites for both men and women. Torcs covered in gold leaf may have been imitations of solid gold objects, which were made only for

tombs. The excavator, S. I. Rudenko, likened this piece to a gold ornament from the Oxus Treasure showing a recumbent lion-griffin in similar pose, although with differences of detail (cat. 225).<sup>52</sup> Representations of such beasts appear in the Altai region at the end of the fourth century BC and replace virtually all other concepts of a feline predator. They are shown not just on torcs but also on bronze plaques used in clothing decoration, felt-appliquéd saddle covers and horse masks.<sup>53</sup> Once integrated into Pazyryk art, they underwent a process of transformation and stylization that produced a new and unique Altaic representation of a horned lion. **EVS**



Bronze, horn, wood  
L. 16.5 and 12.5 cm (horn details), L. 17.7, 5.2 cm (fragmentary bronze tubes)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/179

Fig. 98  
Reconstruction drawing of torc from Pazyryk 2.



**False beard**

Greek and Achaemenid depictions of Scythians invariably show them as heavily bearded, yet all the mummies found in the Pazyryk burial mounds were clean-shaven, as was the chieftain from the second burial mound. Nevertheless, underneath his head, discarded by the looters, and found in the centre of the grave, was a false beard. It was made of human hair, sewn onto a leather strap, which was originally tied at the back. It was described by the excavator as having been 'dyed with an intense black matter, bits of which had been left in the beard, so that after rinsing the hair took on a dark chestnut colour'.<sup>54</sup> It is possible this tie-on beard had a ritual role in the funeral rather than being used in the person's lifetime. It seems significant that the heads of the anthropomorphic characters on the wooden plaques on the bridle and breastplate (from the first Pazyryk burial mound) and the central leather plaque on the saddle (from the second Pazyryk burial mound) all lack moustaches, but sport neatly trimmed beards.<sup>55</sup> This is not the only example of false hair, as another false beard was found in the more recent excavations of another Pazyryk culture tomb at Berel, across the modern border in neighbouring Kazakhstan. **EVS**

Hair, sinew thread, leather  
W. c. 24, L. 37 cm (strap)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/313



This is one of the most important items found at Pazyryk. It is in the shape of a fantastic eagle's head holding a deer head in its beak. Full-length figures carrying geese are depicted either side of its neck. It was found in the burial chamber of Pazyryk-2 at the head of the coffin, but the excavator never commented on its possible function. After the discovery in some Ulandryk and Yustyd burial mounds of crest-like wooden finials, the upper part of which resembled a bird's head, V. D. Kubarev suggested a similar function for that from Pazyryk.<sup>56</sup> More recent excavations on the Ukok plateau and in north-west Mongolia have added further examples.<sup>57</sup>

Three complete headdresses have now been discovered at Ak-Alakha-1 (burial mound 1), Verkh-Kal'dzhin 2 (burial mound 3) and Olon-Kurin-Gol 10 (burial mound 1). All the headdresses with crest-shaped finials use a standard set of decorative motifs of fantastic hoofed animals and eagles. The eagles are either three-dimensional or appliqué. The hoofed animals are either statuettes or in relief with separate heads, and their bodies resemble stylized horses, deer and rams, with separate – usually goat-like – horns, long tails and stylized birds' heads. All may represent different versions of a hoofed griffin, more complete images of which have been found in Pazyryk tattoos (cats 32–33). The bodies of the relief 'deer' (usually with goat's horns) could have images of rams' heads (on the rump) and saiga or goat (on the shoulder).

A comparative analysis of these headdresses allows the reconstruction of the second Pazyryk burial mound headdress. Elements include two double symmetrical compositions of leather and wood, depicting fantastic eagles grappling with hoofed griffins. They were positioned symmetrically, one on either side of the headdress. The animals' bodies are made of thick leather with cut-in relief detail; wooden heads were added separately and have leather ears, with crests on the eagles and horns on the hoofed griffins. The details on each of these compositions are stylistically similar to the finial images, and were probably made by the same craftsman. Although both compositions have sustained considerable

damage, it is possible to reconstruct their appearance because of their symmetry.

It seems curious that the craftsman had not planned for the hoofed character's head to be made separately, and had positioned its front legs differently. In the original version (without the deer head) the composition is almost identical to that on a gold aigrette showing a griffin-vulture with a goat in its talons (cat. 224).

All the details were covered in gold leaf and painted red. The finial was considerably larger than those of common warriors, and the chieftain would have stood out among his army. The great height and weight of the finial, which would have been fixed to the felt hood-base, would have demanded substantial reinforcement. Apart from the ornamental elements, the burial mound contained fragments of the actual hood-headdress, which was made of reddish felt and covered with red madder-dyed plant-based cloth. Vertical strips of the same material were sewn onto the inside of the hood. The chinstraps of the headdress were tied with leather cord.

Overall, this headdress would have had an intimidating effect and might have been worn in the chieftain's final battle. The heads of the eagle and hoofed griffin on the right-hand side have been struck off with a single blow, and the eagle's wing is missing. This damage corresponds with the two pointed-battle-axe wounds on the right side of the chieftain's head, and the severely disfigured left-hand scene coincides with the area of the third blow.

All the Pazyryk culture headdresses with finials come from the south-east Altai region, and are dated to the late fourth to early third century BC. **EVS**

Wood, leather  
H. 34.5 cm; L. 15 cm (leather appliqué)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/170; 1684/162–163, 165, 172, 177, 188

**OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT**

Fig. 99  
Reconstruction of the chieftain's headdress from the second Pazyryk burial mound showing the carved wooden crest of headgear representing a bird of prey with a deer head in its beak. This originally rose above a cap decorated on either side with leather appliqué showing a bird of prey attacking a deer, and these appliqué are shown separately here.

**OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT**

Fig. 100  
Leather appliqué showing a bird of prey attacking a deer, with wooden heads and leather antlers, forming the decoration on the right-hand side of the headgear.







38  
**Man's riding boot**

The calf is made of squares of black and brown fur. The cap is leather, gathered at the toe. The seam between foot and calf is covered with a festoon strip. The heel is sewn through with sinew. The heel of leather boots of a similar style from burial mound 2 at Ulandryk-1 was reinforced in the same way.<sup>58</sup> Stitching through leather with parallel sinew thread seams was a popular technique with the Pazyryks. This was the preferred method for finishing belts (cat. 58) and fur coats (cat. 48). It ensured that the leatherwork was reinforced and reduced the risk of deformation. Occasionally sinew or woollen thread was used to stitch through felt covers. **EVS**

Leather, fur  
L. 68 cm  
Late sixth to early fifth century BC  
Burial mound 2, Bashadar, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1793/15



39  
**Decorated woman's shoe**

The Pazyryk people wore leather and fur footwear over their stockings, and these had a similar style, with a short sole and gathers at the toe. As these materials were less flexible than felt, the calf and toecap were fashioned separately, with the seam covered by a strip of red cloth or cord and the leather sole usually doubled. The woman's leather shoes from the second Pazyryk burial mound are identical in the style of stitching to all other examples of Pazyryk footwear (cat. 38), but are exceptionally richly decorated. Red cord with leather 'duck' shapes covered with gold foil was sewn along the seam connecting the toe cap with the calf. The ornament on the toe cap is laid with thick sinew wrapped with a strip of tin foil intended to imitate silver beadwork, and is attached to the leather with sinew thread. The calf is decorated with appliqué openwork

lotus-like shapes of fine red leather sewn onto a suede base.<sup>59</sup> The outer sole was made of thick leather wrapped in red cloth with leather fringes along the seam. In the centre three rolled strips of red leather form three diamond shapes, the two largest of which are composed of smaller diamonds. These are fixed at the corners with thread wrapped in tin foil, and pyrite crystals sewn into the centre of each. Around the edge of the sole there is a double leather edging with a string of dark beads. Pyrite is common in the Altai region and is often present near gold ore. The level of craftsmanship that allowed for this precise drilling of the tiny and very dense crystals (6–6.5 on the Mohs scale) is astonishing. Each crystal has two holes, under a millimetre in diameter, drilled at right angles from two sides and meeting in the centre.

This use of drilled pyrite crystals was not unique to the Pazyryk area, as pyrite crystals and large beads

decorated a fur coat excavated in burial mound 11 at Berel in neighbouring Kazakhstan,<sup>60</sup> but spun tin embroidery has so far only been found in the second burial mound at Pazyryk (cat. 47). The soles of the second pair of woman's stockings from Pazyryk-2 were also decorated, as their thick leather outer sole has an elegant lotus pattern cut into it. The care taken to decorate the sole is not surprising in a culture where people sat on the floor and the soles of their shoes were often visible. **EVS**

Leather, textile, sinew thread, tin, pyrite crystals, gold foil, glass beads  
L. 34, 16.5 cm (sole)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/219

Woman’s headdress

The base of this female headdress is a flat-topped wooden cap. Rectangular grooves on either side originally held thin ear-like plates with a smooth edge along the bottom, of which only the right one survives. The flat top of the cap was covered with leather. Two circular holes measuring 1.5–2 cm across were made in the nape and four more in the crown (one in the centre and three around the edges). On either side of these are two short hollow cylinders covered in silk and attached to the wooden base by sinew passed through small holes. A row of small holes was drilled through the back, and three of these still contain scraps of sinew. It appears that the headdress originally had a nape cover made of soft material, either cloth, felt or leather, and the entire headdress may have been covered in cloth. This headdress was attached directly to the dark blonde hair of the woman who wore it. Her hair was largely shaved off but left intact on the crown. This portion was then divided into two braids looped through circular holes in the centre of the wooden cap, and wrapped around a black horsehair cord. Wool thread with thick, light-coloured felt strips secured the entire headdress to the top of her head. Another braid, about 37 cm long and made from the hair of the same woman with two woollen cords, was tied to the top of the headdress with twine and knotted at the top and the bottom.<sup>61</sup>

Despite some similar features, the wooden base of this mid-third-century BC headdress-wig from burial mound 5 at Pazyryk is different from earlier wigs. It most closely resembles the female headdress depicted on the belt plaques with the ‘under the tree scene’ from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (fig. 101). It is possible that the woman who wore this was a foreign consort of the chieftain buried in the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk, and this is supported by the fact that her tattoos include designs which are uncommon in Pazyryk imagery, but instead resemble those found to the west. **EVS, SVP**

Wood, leather, hair, wool, felt, silk  
H. c. 40, diam. 17.8 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 5, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/76

Fig. 101  
Detail of a gold belt plaque from Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection showing a woman wearing a tall pigtail-case (cat. 15).



Woman’s knitted hair-case

This was found in the looted second burial mound at Pazyryk. The head of the woman buried here had been shaved, but fragments of her wig were discovered, including an ornament made of human hair in the shape of a knot with a felt ball in the centre and a pair of long strands, one on either side. The strands, with an added felt cord, had been twisted and secured with straps.<sup>62</sup> The cord ends had double-threaded hair-cases in the shape of truncated openwork cones fitted inside each other. Two knitted hair-cases survive. The inner one is undecorated and made of a rough net; the outer has a diamond-like pattern, with a chequerboard of larger cells and knitted squares inside.

Both hair-cases were crocheted using dark red wool composed of two Z-twisted threads.<sup>63</sup> The hair-cases resemble the inner case of a woman’s wig excavated in burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3, but has a different purpose as it covered a vertical strand of hair topped with a deer figure pin (fig. 102). Both burials containing hair-cases also had tall felt caps more than 80 cm in height, which covered the women’s heads. A similar cap found in the Subexi-3 burial in the Tarim basin was covered with a crocheted net resembling that from Pazyryk,<sup>64</sup> and a similar net was included in the female headdress from the ‘royal’ grave at Arzhan-2.<sup>65</sup> It therefore appears that the production and use of crocheted netting was typical of the Central Asian herders in the Scythian period. **EVS, SVP**

Wool  
L. 17.7 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/242

Fig. 102  
Wooden pin finial in the shape of a deer, possibly once covered in tin foil. H. 11.5 cm. Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/154





42

**Hairpin finial with a deer figurine**

Four pin finials were discovered in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk. All were carved from wood into the shape of a deer with pointed muzzle standing on a ribbed spherical base. The antlers and ears were made separately and are leather. Two of the finials were covered in gold foil; the other two were not, but they may have had a layer of silver-like tin foil, which does not tend to survive well. The antlers also differ between the two pairs of deer.

There are numerous comparisons from better-preserved Asian Scythian sites, and these show that they were part of a woman's headdress. A similar pin was discovered above the head of the 'queen' buried at Arzhan-2, but pin finials with a hoofed animal were also typical of common women's burials in the Altai region of the late fourth to early third centuries BC.<sup>66</sup> They belonged to very distinctive headdresses, consisting of a composite crest attached to a wig worn over the shaven head. As well as the pin, the standard set would include an aigrette in the shape of a deer-like silhouette, crocheted and wood-carved braid tops, wooden figures of birds and frame rods. A well-preserved headdress from burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 gives a good idea of the general appearance of this type of headdress (fig. 78).<sup>67</sup> The base was a close-fitting open-topped felt cap, onto which a wig made of horsehair, animal fat, clay (?) and charred cereal grains was built; the hair from the crown of the scalp was then gathered up, pulled through, tied with a woollen cord and felt strip, and then covered with a hair-case made of red wool. Finally a pin with a finial was inserted at the top and a tall 'petal' made of felt with a rod frame (sometimes with cloth stretched over it) attached to the pin. Miniature leather and gold-foil deer were placed on the 'petal' and an aigrette placed at the base of the entire vertical structure.

Scattered elements of this type of headdress were found in the second burial mound at Pazyryk and include fragments of a bronze aigrette, miniature eagles made of wood with separate leather wings and tails, and a crocheted red woollen case for the braid top (cat. 41). However, rather than just one pin, four were found here: perhaps some had been placed in the grave on their own, but it is possible



that the headdress of the chieftain's consort differed from those worn by common Pazyryk women, just as the headdress of the chieftain from burial mound 2 at Pazyryk differed from those of common men (cat. 36). **EVS**

Wood, leather, gold, iron  
L. 5.5, H. 4 cm (deer); L. 7 cm (antlers)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/156, 159

## Textile fibres and dyes

Organic materials, particularly textiles and natural fibres, are rarely found on archaeological excavations, as they are very susceptible to degradation. The frozen burial conditions in the Altai mountains, however, enabled a large number of unique textiles to be preserved in an extraordinarily good state. Colourful garments, saddles and rugs were commonly found in the burial mounds, shedding light on the remarkable culture and artefacts of the Scythian people who flourished on the steppes. Such materials are invaluable sources of information about local production, trading and exchange by these nomadic cultures. The Pazyryk pile carpet is among the most celebrated finds (fig. 161). Considered to be the most ancient carpet in the world, it shows a superb primary example of knot technique. The motifs (rows of horses and horsemen) suggest Achaemenid inspiration,<sup>68</sup> but the deer represented in the inner row is typically Siberian, and insect-based dyes point towards Central Asian production.<sup>69</sup> Plain and decorated Chinese silk objects and locally produced fabrics (felts, plain woven wool and cotton fibres) were found. Decorations with leather, fur and horsehair are also very common.

Scientific analyses have already proved useful in the investigation of the fibres and dyes used for these objects, and in some cases reveal very elaborate manufacture.<sup>70</sup> In most cases the wool was found to be consistent with that of Altai sheep. The Z-twisting of the threads and a tighter twisting of the warps compared to the wefts were typical for the whole Asian region. Plain, looped and twill weaves were all present, although twilling was the prevalent method. Mixtures of dyes of plant origin (madder, indigo and tannins) and animal origin (cochineal, kermes, lac dye) have been identified. Nevertheless, much has still to be learned about the technological skills of these people and the origin of many of these objects. Advanced analytical techniques, such as high-performance liquid chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry (HPLC-MS) and scanning electron microscopy (SEM), provide detailed additional information about the dyes and fibres used for these objects. While many questions will be answered, others will no doubt arise around these exceptional masterpieces, which have divided the opinions of scholars for several decades. **DT, CRC**

Textile fragments from Arzhan-1

The textiles found in the elite early Scythian burial complex at Arzhan-1 are some of the earliest preserved examples of Scythian cloth. The collection consists of just a few dozen fragments, all wool, but woven using a range of different techniques: twill and linen weave with the rep effect (see cat. 43) as well as semi-basket weave, twine and braided cords.<sup>71</sup> They are all of exceptional quality and have a great variety of ornament. Both monochrome and multicoloured fabrics used green, blue, yellow, red and orange dyes, although their sources have not yet been analysed. Where they were made is a more difficult question. The excavator, M. P. Gryaznov, believed they were imported from the same highly developed craft centre and suggested that this was somewhere in Central Asia, as the ‘stepped pyramid’ design had been popular there since the third millennium BC.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, E. G. Tsareva, who studied the kilims from the site, considered them to be locally made.<sup>73</sup> Other finds of cloth in Scythian burial mounds of less well-off people in Tuva prove the existence of local textile production, but these lack the skill and variety shown by those from Arzhan-1.<sup>74</sup> The main difficulty in ascertaining

the origins of the Arzhan textiles remains the lack of comparative material. **LSM, SP**

43  
Woollen textile fragment with ornamented border design

This fine dense cloth fragment is woven in the rep weft technique, a type of linen weave where the weft threads are packed considerably tighter than the base threads, thus creating a ridged effect on the surface along the base. The base threads are much thicker than the weft threads and are twisted more tightly. Originally this cloth was blue (weft thread dyed with indigo) rather than green. The cloth has decorative three-tier piping, which has the effect of separately attached cord. The cord (with sand-coloured and aquamarine stripes along its length) was attached at the top. The bottom part of the piping, decorated with a diamond pattern, is a continuation of the main cloth and shares some of its base threads. The cord effect is achieved through the introduction of much thicker coloured wefts, which altered the weave pattern.<sup>75</sup> The piping pattern is different at one end, but here the change is explained by a tear in the cloth. The cord stitched to the top of the cloth closely resembles a woodblock woven ware, but these always include a weft thread, which is absent here; it is more likely, therefore, that

the cord was made by a different method. The seam connecting the cord with the base material is covered twine, tightly twisted from five dark blue threads. The same technique of covering the seams between textile elements with twine was typical of Xinjiang in the first century BC to early first century AD.<sup>76</sup> The reverse of the join between the cord and the base material has sewn onto it a strip of smooth brown linen-weave material folded in two. **LSM, SVP** with technological identification by E. A. Mikolaychuk and chemical analysis by L. S. Gavrilenko

Wool  
H. 12.5, W. 11 cm  
Second half of ninth to eighth century BC  
Grave 1, chamber 1, Arzhan-1, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by M. P. Gryaznov and M. H. Mannai-ool, 1973)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, GE 2878/158



44  
Woollen textile fragment with stepped design and fragment of twined cord

The bulk of the textiles found at Arzhan-1 come from the central log chamber, a wooden tomb chamber that contained eight males, and another wooden chamber with two broken coffins, containing the body of the chieftain and probably his consort (see pp. 78–79). This burial had been almost entirely looted and destroyed. The floor of the casket had remnants of a sable fur, fragments of three textiles and a length of cord. Fragments of multicoloured material with a stepped-pyramid pattern and the cord belonged to a single item.<sup>77</sup> Such fragments with a cord sewn around the corners and trimmed edges have been found in two other Arzhan burials,<sup>78</sup> but it is hard to determine their purpose: they could have been curtains or rugs,<sup>79</sup> mats or covers, fragments of a funeral garment or a shroud.<sup>80</sup> The textile is of linen weave, with the varying thickness and density of the thread creating the so-called rep effect with parallel ridges on both sides of the material. The double-sided pattern is made in the kilim-weaving method: the multicoloured weft stretched not from edge to edge but just through certain areas, creating blocks of colour.

Textiles made using this technique survive from numerous Central Asian sites from the first

millennium BC to early centuries AD: Arzhan-2,<sup>81</sup> the second Pazyryk burial mound<sup>82</sup> and in the Tarim basin.<sup>83</sup> They illustrate the wide distribution of the kilim method among Iranian-speaking nomad tribes of the region.<sup>84</sup> The stepped-pyramid design had been widely used since the third millennium BC at agricultural sites across southern Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Iran, where it appears on stone and pottery vessels, copper and stone seals, and architectural decoration.<sup>85</sup> It endured in textile crafts; the decorative traditions of the people of Inner and Central Asia still use this motif in carpet weaving.<sup>86</sup> The stepped nature of the pattern is partly dictated by kilim technology but also, just like any other ornament, may have had a specific meaning. Several pairs of woollen trousers survive in Xinjiang sites of the first century BC, and their gusset is made to this stepped shape.<sup>87</sup>

The colours of the cord – dark red and dark green – coincide with two of the five colours in the textile. However, the thread that now appears green was probably originally purple or dark lilac, judging by the chemical analysis of the dye: it includes indigo, which gives a blue tone, as well as purpurin and alizarin, which give the red. The discolouration would have occurred because of various environmental factors over time in the ground. The source of indigo would have been one of many plants; a more precise identification is

problematic in such ancient samples. The source of the red dye was a species of madder used for most of the Arzhan samples. **LSM, SVP** with technological identification by E. A. Mikolaychuk and chemical analysis by L. S. Gavrilenko

Wool  
H. 11.8, W. 8.5 cm (cloth); L. 6.5, W. 2–2.6 cm (cord)  
Second half of ninth to eighth century BC  
Grave 1, chamber 1, Arzhan-1, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by M. H. Mannai-ool and M. P. Gryaznov, 1973)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, GE 2878/163, 2878/164-1





Fragment of a multicoloured striped cloth

In the central chamber at Arzhan-1, around the tomb containing the remains of the chieftain and his consort, were six wooden coffins and two smaller tomb chambers. A fragment of a cloth, quilted from pieces of fine dense striped material, was found in grave 4, whose coffin contained the body of an eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old youth curled up on his left side. Unlike the other burials, this was undisturbed. Found alongside his body was a leather-sheathed dagger, twelve bronze and twenty-six horn arrowheads, a gold earring with turquoise setting, and what the excavators reported as 'numerous remnants of fur outerwear (sable?) and fragments of four-coloured striped woollen cloth', which were indicated on the plan of the burial as occupying the entire area of the coffin beneath the skeleton.<sup>88</sup>



In addition to this piece, two other similar fragments with piping survive in the collection of the Hermitage, and may be part of the same item. Its function is unclear. It is likely that the present fragment and the cloth with pyramid pattern from the 'royal' burial (cat. 44) belong to the same tradition. The ornamental strips do not join and the seam looks rather rough. Such lack of care is surprising, considering the careful hemming of the edges of other textiles found at Arzhan, as well as the convention to cover the seam with decorative stitches or cord (cat. 43), and it may be that this is the back of the cloth. **LSM, svp** with technological identification by E. A. Mikolaychuk and chemical analysis by L. S. Gavrilenko

Wool  
H. 20, W. 33 cm  
Second half of ninth to eighth century BC  
Grave 4, chamber 1, Arzhan-1, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by M. H. Mannai-ool and M. P. Gryaznov, 1973)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, GE 2878/156-1

Red and green woollen garment fragment

This fragment of clothing is probably from a skirt sewn together from horizontal strips of a twill-woven woollen material, around 16–17 cm across. The pieces of material have identical weave patterns, but are



dyed differently. The unique pattern is achieved through regular variation of the weft density. The red strip is dyed with kermes insects and madder, while the green comes from indigo, sorrel and tannin. Another item made of alternating multicoloured strips of twill and tapestry 10 and 16 cm across, found in mound 2 at Pazyryk, is often reconstructed as a skirt. The mummies in this tomb had been taken out of their coffins and their clothing ripped apart by ancient looters, so the textile fragments can only be analysed by comparison with better-preserved examples found at other sites.

A complete skirt sewn from three horizontal strips of woollen material dyed two shades of red was found on the female mummy from burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 (fig. 78). This skirt was 156 cm long, 105 cm across at the top and 132 cm at the hem. A belt made of braided woollen cord was sewn some way below the top and allowed it to fold outwards; fragments of a similar cord were found in the burial chamber of Pazyryk-2, suggesting that it belonged to a similar skirt (figs 79–80).<sup>89</sup> Part of another skirt made of four strips was found in burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-5. The width of the strips is 23.5, 27 and 35.5 cm, although the total length is unknown.<sup>90</sup> However, the closest comparisons for the Pazyryk skirt are found in burials in Xinjiang, where it was found that, after the strips had been stitched together horizontally, the cloth was sewn into a tube.<sup>91</sup> This style was possibly dictated by the limited width of the material and the woven strips, but existed in Xinjiang as early as the Bronze Age. Finally, the bodies of women excavated at Subashi-3 in Xinjiang wore long woven trousers under their skirts. It is natural, then, to expect this garment to appear in the costume of the Altai nomad women, although so far there is no record of such trousers from the female Pazyryk burials. **EVS**

Wool  
H. 25.5, W. 15.2 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/254

47

**Man’s squirrel-fur coat with leather appliqués representing deer heads**

This was sewn with sinew thread and made using the same technique as the woman’s fur coat (cat. 48). It is decorated with fine appliqué in the form of a pair of deer’s heads with antlers topped with the heads of fantastic eagles and the horns finished with gold-leaf circles. The fold of the fur coat was decorated with a strip of fur originally dyed purple with indigo and kermes but now faded to blue, over which diagonal rows of leather circles and gold leaf had been sewn.

Most fur coats recovered from Pazyryk culture sites belonged to chieftains and were made from squirrels, sables and Siberian weasels. Frost rarely formed beneath the smaller burial mounds, hence most clothes from these have perished, but two men’s coats found in burials of common people on the Ukok plateau were made of sheepskin.<sup>92</sup> It is possible that the range of furs worn by nomads for their outer garments were more varied and included skins taken from both domesticated and wild animals whose habitat was in the immediate proximity to the nomads. This is supported by recent analysis of finds from Tuva burial mounds of the Scythian period, which showed that the fur coats may have been sourced from mountain hares, jerboas and horses, including both domesticated and wild Przewalski’s horses.<sup>93</sup> **EVS**

Fur, leather, gold coating  
L. 87, W. 82 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/202



48

**Woman’s coat fragment with appliqué decoration**

This fur coat fragment was found in the second burial mound at Pazyryk and is made of carefully trimmed squirrel skins, with the fur on the inside. The best parts of the skins were the backs; these were stitched into vertical strips, which were then sewn together. Once the details of the coat had been made, the outside of the skins was worked through with small sinew-thread stitches. The distance between the stitches was around 4 mm, with the length of the stitch under 1 mm. The stitch would only catch the top layer of the leather, leaving the fur side intact and ensuring the coat’s durability and ornate pattern on the outside.

Once the base was completed, the coat was decorated on the outside with strips of thick light-coloured leather, onto which were sewn openwork appliques made of finer dark leather, with minute stitches of sinew going around the contours of every appliqué. Openwork strips have two types of ornament, with cockerel crests and vegetation being an element of both. Below the round appliqué detail were sewn-on bronze plaques, covered in gold foil, with ibex-head images, although almost all are now missing, probably through the ancient looting of this grave.

The back of the coat had coat-tails. This curious detail often appears on Pazyryk clothing, including a man’s sheepskin coat from burial mound 3 of the Verkh-Kal’dzhin burial site, and a so-called ‘tuxedo’ (silk-covered jacket made of sable fur) from the Katandin burial mound.<sup>94</sup> The purpose of the coat-tails is unknown. Outerwear with a longer back must have been fairly popular in Central Asia during the Scythian period. Images of archers wearing coat-tails appear on petroglyphs in Kazakhstan. A longer-backed jacket appears on one of the Persepolis reliefs, worn by one of the *Sakā* tribute bearers. Fragments of an ‘opulent horseman’s cape’ with false sleeves and a ‘tail’ were excavated in burial mound 260 at Altynasar-4 in the Syr darya valley, belonging to the Dzhetyasar culture.<sup>95</sup>

This coat was trimmed around the hem and chest with a wide strip of black foal hide and a strip of purple (now blue) otter (?) fur, which had been



died with indigo and madder. The narrow sleeves are false, so the coat would have been worn as a cape, like the Iranian *kandys* (see fig. 76). A man’s fur coat from the same burial had similarly narrow sleeves, sewn up at the cuff. Such decorative clothing has also been found in other burials of Pazyryk chieftains (cats 49–50). **EVS**

Squirrel fur, leather  
H. 25, W. 30 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/200



49

**Man’s sleeve with appliqué**

This narrow false sleeve from a man's garment was decorated with sewn-on openwork leather appliqué covered in gold leaf, small fragments of which survive. Garments with narrow sleeves such as this were worn like capes, like the Iranian *kandys*, and have been found exclusively in chieftains' burials: examples include the woman's squirrel-fur coat and the man's sable-fur coat (the coat sleeves rather narrow, but wide enough for the arm to fit through, sewn shut at the cuff) from the second Pazyryk burial mound, and the 'tuxedo' (silk-covered sable-fur jacket with long coat-tails) and a richly decorated kaftan, made of Siberian weasel fur, discovered in the Katandin burial mound. The latter is similar in style to clothing with long false sleeves that was found at the site of Subexi-1 in Tarim.<sup>96</sup> **EVS**

Leather  
L. 32.5 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound 1, Tuekta, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2179/972

50

**Man’s trouser fragment with openwork detail**

These trousers were made of fragments of carefully worked fine leather and decorated with a stripe made of black foal skin and openwork strips of fine leather covered in gold leaf, some of which still survives. The fur shows signs of copper oxide, perhaps left by copper plaques. Most of the men's trousers found at Pazyryk were made of twill woollen cloth, dyed red and probably locally made. They consist of two rectangular or slightly narrowing legs and a square or rhomboid insert on the inside seam.<sup>97</sup> The top edge is folded out and sewn up; the narrow fold would fit a length of cord. Such trousers were worn tucked into felt stockings. Identical trousers are widely known from Xinjiang, for instance in Shampula and Jumbulak, as well as the abandoned burials at Zaghunluq and Subexi-1.<sup>98</sup> **EVS**

Leather, fur  
L. 82 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound 1, Tuekta, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2179/973



51

**Felt stockings with ornamental bands**

Three pairs of thin white (undyed) felt stockings were discovered in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk. Two are thought to have belonged to the woman buried here, and the third to the man. All were made in two parts with a solid calf-length sock gathered at the toe into a cap and a short sole. The sizes are very similar and the soles are almost identical, measuring 20 cm long and 5 cm across at the widest part. The sock has a single seam at the back, which was made by over-sewing; a similar seam attaches the sole. Each stocking was trimmed around the top with appliquéd strips of white felt decorated with twisted woollen thread embroidery. The ornament of the appliqué on the woman's stocking consists of a variation of lotus palmettes joined into a garland, while the man's has heart-shaped figures. The hem along the upper edge of the stocking helped to prevent fraying and was a necessary step in working any felt garment.

Felt stockings have been found at other Pazyryk culture burial mounds, namely Ak-Alakha-1 burial mound 1, Ak-Alakha-3 burial mound 1, Verkh-Kal'dzhin-2 burial mounds 1 and 3, and Berel burial mound 11.<sup>99</sup> These stockings are structurally identical. A pair of woman's stockings from burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 also had a decorative appliqué strip of red felt along the top with a row of palmettes with a central bud and swirl-shaped petals, although these are not as complex or multicoloured as this one. The amount and richness of the decoration on the felt stockings from the second Pazyryk burial mound denotes the higher social status of the people buried there. Long felt stockings were a typical element of the Asian nomadic costume of the Scythian period and were worn by both men and women. Felt stockings similar to the Pazyryk type can be seen in a number of images: for example, among the tribute shown being carried by *Sakā* represented on the eastern facade of the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis or on the horseman on the bronze brazier found near Almaty in present-day Kazakhstan (fig. 72).<sup>100</sup> The styles of felt stockings from Scythian-period burial mounds at Subexi, Zaghunluq, Jumbulakum in Xinjiang

province of northern China resemble those from Pazyryk and also possess a short sewn-on sole, gathers at the toe and sometimes have an ornamental stripe along the upper edge of the sock. **EVS**



Felt  
L. 89 cm; W. 13.5 cm (ornamental strip)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/587–588

Ornamental stripe

This ornamental strip decorated a female garment from the second Tuekta burial mound near Pazyryk. Craftsmen of this Altai region were skilled at producing fine gold and tin foil, which was used to cover decorative details in wood, bone and bronze, as well as leather appliqué. Leather medallions, scales, diamond patterns, openwork detail and entire openwork strips covered in foil were sewn with sinew thread onto a base. While felt and fine dyed-leather appliqué would usually go around the entire perimeter, leather appliqué with foil was only used on specific areas of the garment. All edges and protruding elements were neatly fixed – corresponding perforations survive on both – with leather and foil fragments. The male costume from the first Tuekta burial mound was decorated with larger openwork strips, only small fragments of which survive (cats 49–50). Unfortunately, when these tombs were looted, not only were the precious and metal objects removed, but even the foil was taken. **EVS**

Gold  
L. 17.7 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound 2, Tuekta, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2180/141



Sable-fur pouch

This rounded pouch is made from sable fur: the front is made of the best parts of the fur (from the backs of the sables) and has a darker shade, whereas the reverse consists of small rectangular fragments of lighter and poorer quality fur from the bellies. It was found empty in a looted chamber. The same burial mound produced fragments of a large man's sable-fur coat, trimmed at the collar and hems with black foal hair, and with leather gold-plated appliqué with rectangles and triangular petals. These are not the only examples showing the use of sable fur: a silk-finished sable-fur jacket with long coat-tails was discovered by V. V. Radlov in the Katandin burial mound as early as 1865 and is now in the State History Museum in Moscow. **EVS**

Fur  
H. 21, W. 26 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/107



Leather purse

This leather purse with a wollen cord tie was used to store black dye and was found in the tomb chamber of the second burial mound at Pazyryk. A similar-looking dye had been used on the false beard of the male burial, but neither has yet been scientifically analysed to understand their composition (cat. 35). **EVS**

Leather, wool  
H. 19.5, W. 11.5 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/99





55

Horn container

This is cut from the upper part of a wild goat's horn, and contains scraps of leather with traces of dye folded into a satchel shape. A similar horn, containing a small wooden spoon, was found in the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk. Horn was commonly used in the past and was particularly easily available among nomadic herders. However, as it is organic it does not survive well in archaeological conditions unless they are very arid, waterlogged or frozen, as in the case of the Altai burials. **EVS**

Horn, leather  
L. 10, W. 4 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/116



56

Small leather pouch containing nail clippings

This double-leather pouch was found inside the tomb chamber in the second burial mound at Pazyryk. The clippings were placed inside a small fine-leather bag carefully sewn up using a sinew thread, tied with a thin cord sewn to the top, rolled up and placed within a triangular piece of cloth, which was then stitched through with a thick-spun woollen thread. We cannot be certain when the clippings were cut, but judging by their number and shape they appear to be a full set, cut at the same time, perhaps not long before death or as part of the post-mortem ceremonies.<sup>101</sup> The same tomb also contained a sewn-up rectangular satchel with human hair collected from a comb. These finds are not unique, as small satchels or pouches of leather and felt containing strands of hair, hair from combs and nails have been found at other Altai sites, including the first burial mound at Pazyryk and the first burial mound of Verkh-Kal'dzhin-2. The Ossetian *Tales of the Narts* (see p. 258), which contains many allusions to Scythian style practices, includes a reference to how removing the finger- and toenails served as a substitute for real individuals.<sup>102</sup> **EVS**



Leather, wool, human remains  
L. 17.8, W. 6.3 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/100, 102

57

Single-sided composite comb

This is one of several wooden combs found with burials at Arzhan-2. All are of the same type and made of different sections with the teeth sandwiched between the side plates. Most were found with female burials, but some accompanied male burials. Similar combs have also been found at contemporary sites in Xinjiang, which may suggest a connection between the two regions in the early Scythian period.<sup>103</sup> At other Scythian sites in the Altai region single-sided one-part horn combs have been found.<sup>104</sup> As a rule, combs were carried in bags on the belt, along with mirrors, proving that combing was a normal part of personal grooming. **KVC**

Wood  
L. 4.1, W. 1.3 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2002)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/43



**Decorated belt with a rectangular silver holder, representing a goat and a predator, and two straps, one with a pendant silver horse figure**

The belt and suspended straps are made of finely finished leather, sewn with minute stitches of sinew thread. The decoration on this man's belt stands out because of its unique style: the fine detail on both the inside and the outside of the diamond designs, and the hems of the belt and straps done with sinew thread wrapped in tin leaf. Tear-shaped, triangular and semicircular appliqué details covered in gold leaf were used as part of the embroidery. Tin twine created the illusion of silver seed bead embroidery. This technique was also used on a number of objects from the same burial – another belt, women's shoes (cat. 39), a strap on the fragment of a lacquer dagger sheath made of leopard skin in the shape of a feline predator's head – but does not appear on any other object in



the Altai region. It is possible that all were made by the same skilled craftsman. Apart from the missing buckles, the belt had two silver plaques, with images of a feline predator attacking a goat. Rectangular buckles with an elongated opening in the lower part belong to the standard corpus of Pazyryk belts, widely represented in the common warrior graves. They were usually made of wood, decorated with carved patterns. The two silver plaques were imported, probably from Central Asia. The jewelry work is of the highest standard. The hole made in the plaques for suspending the straps may have been made later, perhaps while making the belt. The thin straps, decorated with gold circles, had small silver horse shapes hung from them. These were made of two parts: an upper plate with a relief image and a flat bottom plate, following the contour of the top plate, and the space between was filled with black waxy material. The plaques and horse shapes were made of 96% silver. A wider strap next to the plaque was

used to suspend a tool or weapon. The purpose of the straps with pendants is not entirely clear; it may have been purely ornamental. **EVS**

Leather, sinew threads, tin, silver, gold coating  
L. 61, W. 3.5 cm; L. 5.5, W. 4.4 cm (holder);  
L. 5.5 cm (horse)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/230, 234

**59 Knife and awl in sheath**

Knives and awls were two of the most common everyday items found in the Scythian tombs at Aymyrylg. They were made of either bronze or iron, and some of the awls had bone handles. They were placed inside leather scabbards like this one, and were worn by men and women and suspended from relatively wide thick belts.<sup>105</sup> **SUS**

Copper alloy, leather, wood  
L. 20 cm  
Sixth to third century BC  
Aymyrylg VIII, 18, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. M. Mandelshtam, 1971)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2940/10

**60 Fragments of a painted and carved whip handle**

The whip handle is carved with the scene of a leopard attacking a horse, their bodies intertwined in combat. The predator's head is level with the whipstock. At the front of the crop under the horse's hooves are two holes for attaching the whip strap; at the back end, one hole for the whip. The handle is dyed red with madder. Whips were used to control horses but, like the belt, weapons and headgear, also denoted status among the nomads. They are also regularly depicted in the Black Sea region and appear to have been light and made of thick rods, occasionally carved at the tip like this example,

sometimes with a bone handle, a leather loop at one end and several fine tails at the other. **EVS**

Wood  
L. 11.3, 19.6 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/488

**61 Whetstone or touchstone with golden handle**

Metal tools and weapons require regular sharpening if in frequent use, and objects such as this are commonly found in Scythian warrior graves. They resemble rod- or stick-shaped whetstones widely used across the Near East and Eurasia from the third millennium BC onwards. Elaborate examples were capped at the top with an ornamental metal handle representing the head of an animal.<sup>106</sup> These could be worn thrust through the belt, as depicted on ninth-century BC Late Assyrian sculptures, or suspended by means of a metal ring passed through a drilled perforation at one end of the whetstone. Scythian whetstones were made of many different varieties of stone, but the absence of wear on some, such as this example, has led some scholars to regard them either as touchstones used to test the purity of gold or amulets, possibly used by the members of the Scythian elite.<sup>107</sup> This last hypothesis is not inconsistent with the details of the Ossetian epic *Tales of the Narts* (see p. 258), in which giants would rub whetstones on their wounds in order to heal them.<sup>108</sup> **AYUA**

Stone, gold  
L. 18.4, diam. 2 cm  
350–325 BC  
Chertomlyk, Dnieper region, northern Black Sea region (excavations by Ivan Zabelin, 1863)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1863 I/446





Mirrors

The first mirrors come from Anatolia, date to the seventh millennium BC and were hand-held polished chunks of obsidian set into plaster.<sup>109</sup> Thereafter nothing is known until the third millennium BC, when advances in metallurgy enabled the production of polished circular metal mirrors with tangs usually set into wooden, bone or horn handles (cat. 62), and less commonly with cast-on metal handles. This form of mirror became popular from Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean to as far east as Afghanistan and the Indus region, and remained in fashion at least as late as the Achaemenid period.<sup>110</sup> Thereafter, circular mirrors of glass or metal were used, with separate traditions developing in the Roman world and China but both spreading into Central Asia and the Middle East, where they were widely copied. As mirrors are easily scratched and metal examples rely on a high degree of polish to have any effect, it is not surprising to find that they were kept in soft pouches, leather containers or small boxes, and examples of these containers have been found in Scythian tombs: silver- and copper-alloy disc mirrors found in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk were kept in leopard-skin or leather cases; both the 'king' and 'queen' at Arzhan-2 had a circular bronze mirror placed in front of their faces in separate leather bags; and a circular copper-alloy mirror with decorated gold handle was found inside a nut-wood case in the right hand of the woman buried in the rich grave at Taksai-I (cats 67, 217). Other mirrors had a grooved handle decorated with archaic Scythian animals (cat. 63); once thought to be products of Olbia, a Greek Black Sea colony, they were probaby made in different workshops.<sup>111</sup> **sus**



62

Tanged mirror

Copper alloy (organic handle not preserved)  
Diam. 15.4 cm  
Third century BC  
Tjutrinski burial mound  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 2788/12

63

Mirror with a boar and feline on the handle

Copper alloy  
L. 35.5, diam. 18 cm  
About 600 BC  
Kuban region, north Caucasus (chance find)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 2539/1



64

Mirror with depictions of deer and a goat

The mirror is cast from tin bronze, which explains its silvery appearance, and the face was originally polished and reflective. The back has a raised border, and used to have a small loop handle in the centre but this broke in antiquity. Around the handle are five deer and a goat, all represented in profile with their eyes rendered as small circles and their horns as S-bends. All have thin legs with sharp hooves, as if they were walking on tiptoes. This style originates in an earlier period, and is shown on the 'deer stones' and rock art of the Altai-Sayan and Mongolian regions.<sup>112</sup> In antiquity, mirrors may have had more of a magical than a practical purpose, and alongside high-quality polished pieces we often see roughly cast 'models' or even fragments of mirrors. In Scythian and Hun-Sarmatian times, mirrors were a necessary part of the burial assemblage for both women and men. **EVS**

Bronze  
Diam. 13.5 cm  
Eighth to seventh century BC  
Bukhtarma, western Altai mountains, southern Siberia (P. K. Frolov collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1122/54

65

Mirror with a loop-shaped handle

The handle is in the form of a pair of felines engaged in combat and shown partly in profile, partly from the front: their curved tails and heads with pointed ears are emphasized, and even the claws are shown on one paw, while the leaf-shaped settings on the haunches and shoulders resemble those intended to hold coloured inlays.<sup>113</sup> **LSM**

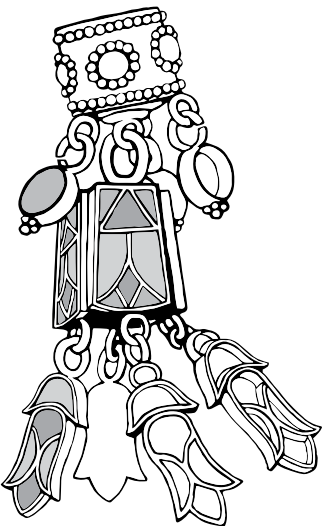
Bronze  
Diam. 6.2 cm  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Burial mound 13, Sagly-Bazhi II cemetery, Ovyursky district, western Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. D. Grach, 1961)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2351/286

Pair of decorated gold earrings

This pair belonged to the woman buried at Pazyryk-2 who had both ears pierced, unlike the men at Pazyryk-2 and 5 who only had pierced left lobes. This pair of earrings is made of small sections of gold sheet decorated with fine granulation and red and light blue paste, with suspended miniature pendants. Both were damaged during the life of the owner, as two pendants were broken and other parts are missing, but were repaired with solder and sinew thread. The excavator concluded they were an import from the Achaemenid empire."<sup>14</sup> **EVS**

Gold, coloured paste  
H. 3.5, 1.5 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/182-83

Fig. 103  
Reconstruction drawing of cat. 66.



Decorated gold earring

This extraordinary earring is part of a pair from a woman's grave in burial mound 6 at Taksai-I in western Kazakhstan excavated in 2012. The conical upper portion is decorated with granulation carefully arranged in two rows at top and bottom; a series of gold loops on the underside supports granulated and elongated bud-like drops, with an elaborate longer element hanging from the centre. The woman's body was poorly preserved and burned, but enough of it remained to show that she had been laid on her back on a floor covering, and the presence of numerous small gold appliqués with the heads of griffins and sheep implies that she was buried clothed. Other grave goods included a pair of gold bangles (cat. 218), a comb showing combat between a Scythian and an Achaemenid (cat. 214), a wooden bowl with gold overlays and a double-sided copper alloy mirror with gold-plated handle, which had been stored inside a hazel-wood box. The identity of the woman is unknown but the Eurasian nomads' love of gold was mentioned by Herodotus in connection with the Massagetae: 'gold is the adornment of their headgear and belts and girdles'.<sup>15</sup> **SUS, YL**

Gold  
H. 11 cm, wt 89 g  
500–450 BC  
Burial mound 6, Taksai-I, Kazakhstan (excavations by M. N. Sdykov and Y. A. Lukpanova)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana TK2-928 (BKOM-9241/17)





68

Gold earring with a granulated gold pendant

Rare archaeological discoveries of unrobbed graves such as that at Arzhan-2 in Tuva illustrate the great riches interred in 'royal' Scythian tombs and the source of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection. At Arzhan-2 earrings were commonly found with the burials. Most were of the same type, a hoop earring with a soldered cone. In Early Scythian Central Asia such jewelry can be considered a sort of cultural marker. Most were decorated with granulation but this earring also has a series of small holes punched through the bottom, which were used to suspend a series of small turquoise beads found nearby and originally presumably secured with sinew string. The earring has also been crudely repaired. This suggests that such a precious object was made for nomads by master craftsmen from highly developed settlements, but when it broke there was not the local skill to perform fine soldering. The same conclusion may apply to all the granulated pieces. **KVC**

Gold  
Diam. of ring 2.5 cm, L. of pendant 1.2 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan 2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/62

69

Necklace of cylindrical white paste beads

L. 1, diam. 0.5 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 3, Shibe, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 4888/48



70

Bead necklace

This necklace includes 57 spherical cornelian beads, a single large flat cornelian bead and other unidentified materials, possibly green glass. **KVC**

Cornelian, glass (?)  
Diam. 0.3–0.6 cm (spherical); 1.2 x 0.8 cm (flat)  
About third century BC  
Aymyrlyg VIII, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. M. Mandelshtam, 1971)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2940/2/1-59

71

Decorated blue and white glass beads

These spotted 'eye' beads were made by wrapping hot dark blue glass around an iron rod and rolling this over a solid surface on which the separately made blue and white 'eyes' were placed. Repeated heating and rolling pressed these into the bead surface until they were smooth. The rod was then removed but has left a reddish stain in the perforation.

**KVC**

Glass  
Diam. 0.8 cm  
About third century BC  
Aymyrlyg VIII, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. M. Mandelshtam, 1971)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2940/4/1-4

72

Necklace of gold, amber and coloured stone beads

Beads and pendants are the most abundant and varied of the finds made at Arzhan-2 and most were imported. Analysis of the amber showed that its composition is identical to the Baltic type, but it is possible that raw materials were imported and worked locally as there are identical drop-shaped pendants made of different materials and strung in combinations of red, green and gold. A pattern of grouping three per garment has been observed on the ‘queen’s’ dress, while her necklace was alternating disc-shaped turquoise and amber beads of the same size. Multicoloured drop-like pendants and beads were sewn onto bags. Biconical beads formed part of the necklace of the woman buried in an accompanying grave, but were not present in any other burials. They come in two colours: reddish-orange and yellowish-green. Most green or blue-green stone beads were originally thought to be turquoise, but later scientific analysis using X-Ray Diffraction (XRD) showed them to be variscite, a related mineral. Perhaps the distinction between minerals was not as important to the ancient miners as the quality of the stone. The much later (tenth-century) Islamic writer al-Biruni notes that the jewelers describe the highest quality turquoise as ‘hard, sharp, deep-coloured, lustrous and brilliant’, followed by a milky variety called *shirfam*: ‘it has also been claimed that the best variety is the *shirfam*, followed by the *asmani ‘aqiq* [heavenly agate]. Both these kinds are the original ones: the remaining ones are their derivatives.’<sup>116</sup> **kvc**

Gold (64), amber (42), stone (64)

Diam. 0.3-0.9 cm

Seventh century BC

Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,

2917/33/1-114, 116-171



73

Necklace of coloured stone and glass beads

Stone, glass

Diam. spherical beads 0.4–0.8; L. oblong beads

0.7–0.9 cm

Seventh century BC

Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,

2917/52/237-309

74

Etched carnelian and other beads

The reddish beads with white designs are known as etched carnelian. These beads appear to have been decorated using a method developed in South Asia as early as the third millennium BC, and which

has been reconstructed through replication, observation and interviews recorded with Indian bead-makers. The process involved painting designs onto the beads using a sticky alkaline substance, such as carbonate of soda mixed with plant juice, and heating them in an oven. This deepened the colour of the stone and transformed the painted areas to white designs. In 1933 Horace Beck, widely regarded as the father of bead studies in Europe, published a seminal article outlining three main chronological groups of etched carnelian beads.<sup>117</sup> The first dates from the third millennium BC, was made in the Indus valley, and is a diagnostic indicator of trade with Mesopotamia, Iran and Central Asia.<sup>118</sup> Beck tentatively dated Group B between the third century BC and the second century AD, and Group C between the sixth and tenth centuries. Further research shows that the latest group is probably late and post-Sasanian,<sup>119</sup> but the Group B beads have not been studied in

detail, and the wide variety of shapes, designs, quality of manufacture and different find-spots suggests that they were made at different periods and in different centres. The etched beads from Arzhan-2 belong to another variety not known from India but reported from Iran: these were not well dated and the excavated finds from Arzhan-2 are important evidence for dating them to the seventh century BC.<sup>120</sup> They are much more crudely made than the earlier beads and may be of Central Asian or Iranian manufacture. **kvc, sus**

Seventh century BC

Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/68





75

Gold ornament

The graves at Arzhan-2 contained gold objects decorated with granulation. This spectacular object once adorned the footwear of a woman buried alongside the 'king' in the main burial of the burial mound at Arzhan-2. The front is covered with gold granulation and in the centre there are evenly spaced tear-shaped cells outlined with gold wire that hold glass inlays. The glass is weathered but was originally light bluish-green and was used to imitate turquoise. The edges are strengthened with gold wire.<sup>121</sup> **KVC**

Gold, glass  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/3



76

Carved-horn belt clasps

These clasps are a pair carved in openwork to represent ibexes with twisted hindquarters; one has the additional figure of a goat.

Horn  
H. 5.3, L. 9.5 cm  
Sixth to third century BC  
Aymyrlyg, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. M. Mandelshtam and E. U. Stambulnik)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2949/1/1–2



77

Decorated-horn belt buckle

This relief plaque depicts a reclining horse with bent legs and downward-looking head. The mane is represented as a row of stylized leaf-like cells, which in metal would have held coloured inlays.<sup>122</sup> An incised design covers the figure, forming spirals on the shoulder and upper leg that resemble muscles. The head, with its raindrop-shaped eye, rounded nostril and half-open mouth, is shown in particularly fine detail. Four small holes – two at the neck and two by the tail – originally attached the plaque to a leather backing, and the larger opening in the centre probably held a belt with a knot at its end, meaning that the plaque could have functioned as a buckle. **LSM**

Horn  
L. 11 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound 13, Sagly-Bazhi II burial ground, Sagly village, Ovyursky district, western Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. D. Grach, 1961)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2351/268



Decorative plaques in the form of deer

Recumbent deer with bent legs are a standard motif of 'Animal Style' decorative art, occurring over the entire geographic range of Scythian-period pastoralists from the Yuhuangmiao burial site near Beijing to Tápiószentmárton in Hungary. Scythian deer-shaped plaques, such as those from Kul' Oba in Crimea or from Kostromskaya in the Kuban region, are fairly large, made of gold and probably decorated *gorytos* quivers (cat. 120). Similar golden ornaments but in a different style and decorated with turquoise inlays were found on a quiver in the Chilikty burial mound in eastern Kazakhstan (cat. 82). The fact that these artefacts come from elite burials suggests that images of a recumbent deer had special significance: some scholars believe they represent a sacrificial animal, but others interpret them as celestial deer worshipped as deities by these nomads. Bronze deer-shaped plaques, occasionally covered with gold leaf, are also common among Tagar culture finds from southern Siberia. These are smaller than the Scythian examples with loops on the back, and were therefore probably attached to clothing to show the wearer's status or position in society. **kvc**

78–81  
**Bronze plaques representing deer**  
  
Bronze  
L. 6.8–9.8 cm  
Eighth to sixth century BC  
Krasnoyarsk region and Minusinsk valley, southern Siberia (excavation by A. V. Adrianov at Dumnaya Hill near Minusinsk in 1895; P. N. Kornilov collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1126/84-85, 1126/111, 1293/198



82  
**Two gold plaques representing deer**

The heads of the deer are raised and the nostrils and mouth marked with small perforations. The large rounded eye is also punctured through. The ears contain turquoise inlays. The antlers are large, branched, curving along the back of the deer, with one branch pointed forwards, and four to the back. The base of the antlers is outlined with granulation. The body is elongated with a pronounced front shoulder blade and hindquarters, and the hooves are sharp and finely detailed. The plaques are of the same type, hammered in low relief from a sheet of gold.<sup>123</sup> These realistic items are two of a series of twelve identical plaques excavated at burial mound 5 at Chilikty in south-east Kazakhstan.

This large burial mound was constructed at the turn of the seventh century BC and is the oldest Central Asian burial mound after Arzhan-1 (see pp. 78–79). It was excavated in 1960 by an expedition led by S. S. Chernikov, and was 66 m across and 6 m high. The shallow pit (8 by 8 by 0.5 m) contained a rectangular structure built of two rows of thick logs, covered with a decking from the same type of wood and entered from the east by a log-roofed entrance. The chamber had been closed with large boulders, over the top of which a thick layer of clay had been laid and sealed with earth and rocks. The outside of the tomb had been covered with large pebbles.<sup>124</sup> The central chamber contained a double burial. Although it had been heavily looted, it contained the remains of a leather bowcase to which these plaques had originally been attached.

Other finds included coiled feline predators (cat. 85), eagle figurines with heads turned to one side, gold-foil figures of wild boars, a fish encrusted with turquoise and decorated with fine gold granulation, a plaque in the shape of a bird with its wings spread out, and some smaller ornaments. **LSM**  
  
Gold, turquoise  
H. 4.6, W. 7.1 cm; wt 7.94 g  
Second half of the eighth to first half of the seventh century BC  
Burial mound 5, Chilikty, eastern Kazakhstan (excavations by S. S. Chernikov, 1960)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2326/1, 1936





83  
**Plaque representing a tiger with a ram's head in its mouth**

Tiger-shaped plaques like this show that the southern Siberian pastoralists maintained contacts with northern China, where scores have been found in the Ordos and adjacent regions. Some scholars associate the latter with the Loufan, a 'barbarian' tribe that Chinese sources locate in the country's north-western borderlands.<sup>125</sup> A carved wooden trough from a burial mound at Bashadar-2 is decorated with a similar motif. **KVC**

Bronze  
L. 7.7 cm  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Chance find, Askiz village, southern Siberia  
(I. A. Lopatin collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 5531/1396

84  
**Predator-shaped decorative plaque**

Images of crouching predators appeared at the very beginning of nomadic decorative art: the earliest example, dated to about 800 BC, comes from the burial mound at Arzhan-1 and shows a snow leopard.<sup>126</sup> The circular silhouette of the animal perhaps symbolized the sun, and the ornamental spirals on this piece would have reinforced this shape. **KVC**

Bronze  
Diam. 3.6 cm  
Eighth to seventh century BC  
Chance find, southern Siberia (I. A. Lopatin collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 5531/1365



85  
**Gold plaques**

These plaques are in the shape of a coiled feline predator with its head turned to right and left respectively. The nostrils, eyes and ears are indicated by circular cavities with raised edges, and similar features are repeated on the body. They may have originally been inlaid, and were made by hammering pieces of gold sheet in low relief. They were found in the same grave as cat. 82. **LSM**

Gold  
H. 1.5–1.6, W. 1.8 cm; wt 1.8 g  
Second half of eighth to first half of seventh century BC  
Burial mound 5, Chilikty, eastern Kazakhstan (excavations by S.S. Chernikov, 1960)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, GE 2326/4, 2649





86  
**Plaques in the form of a human head in a headdress, turned to the right and left**

These tiny plaques were excavated in a looted burial mound at Bugry in the Tuva region of southern Siberia. They show a human profile wearing headgear. The face is shown in low relief and has a beardless chin, almond-shaped eye, protruding nose and lips, high cheekbone and rounded cheek; the ear is rendered as a spiral. The headgear has a rounded crest with a circular protrusion at the centre of its base. The headgear's clearly outlined lower edge goes over the ear towards the forehead. The lower ends of all three plaques are damaged and they seem to have been part of larger images. The famous burial mound at Issyk in present-day Kazakhstan contained a single human image, a profile head on a seal ring. The style of its headgear differs from the Bugry plaques, but the heads themselves are very similar. On the basis of wide-ranging comparisons, A. Akishev interprets this head as a depiction of the god Mithras and draws an analogy with the so-called *kouros*, or statue of a young man, from the Oxus

Treasure: the headgear of this statuette is very similar in outline to that on the Bugry plaques, and the vertical cut in its centre may have held an additional element, such as the rounded protrusion seen on these plaques (fig. 104).<sup>127</sup> Fragmentary though they are, the Bugry finds therefore suggest that nomads transmitted many new features of material and religious culture across the length of Eurasia; for example, the cult of Mithras, which had its origins in the east, ultimately reached Roman Europe. **kvc**

Bronze, gold (coating)  
L. 1.7, W. 1.3 cm; L. 1.65, W. 1.45 cm; L. 1.9, W. 2.05 cm  
Late third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Bugry burial mound, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, 2009)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2951/33–35

Fig. 104  
Detail of a silver gilt statuette from the Oxus Treasure. H. 29.2 cm. Fifth to fourth century BC.  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.4  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks



87  
**Plaques in the form of a feline predator turned right and left – cloth decoration**

These tiny gold plaques were made using punches, which meant that identical sets could be made very quickly. They are part of a much larger set originally sewn onto the clothing of the chief or 'king' in the burial mound at Arzhan-2. The amount of gold indicated his high status and the choice of a predator figure may have been to emphasize his power. **kvc**

Gold  
H. 1.1, W. 2 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/20/71-100, 2917/21/71-100





88

**Gold plaque with reliefs of a battle between a horseman and a foot warrior**

This trapezoidal gold plaque shows a battle scene between a horseman and a foot soldier and was found in the entrance passageway of a 6-m-high burial mound partially explored in 1859. This object is a rare example of local Scythian art in the northern Black Sea region. The repoussé technique shows the warriors' armour and weapons in great detail: both are wearing knee-length scale armour tunics and Greek (Corinthian and Chalcidian) helmets with nose guards, large cheek plates and conical crests. Their lower legs are protected with shin guards, and they carry bow cases on their thighs. The horseman is holding a spear in a horizontal lance-like fashion, and is riding a horse with a trimmed mane, with a tuft of longer hair at the front in the style of Asiatic horses. The position of the rider is unusual, and in late antiquity was associated with heavily armed warriors known as cataphracts. The function of the plaque is also unclear, but perhaps decorated a bridle. It has also been suggested that it depicts a battle enacted during clan celebrations or a funerary ritual, such as a re-enactment of the 'two brothers' myth concerning the progenitors of the branches of the Scythian tribe; the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus wrote of two brothers, Palus and Napes, said to be the ancestors of the different nomadic groups.<sup>128</sup> **AYUA**

Gold  
H. 14, W. 19 cm  
Fourth century BC  
Geremesov burial mound, Geremesov Khutor village, Dnieper, northern Black Sea (excavations by I. E. Zabelin, 1859)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1859 1/2



89

**Gold plaques showing a lion attacking a deer**

This scene of a predator attacking a deer is typical and characteristic of all areas of the Scythian lands, but only seven plaques of this type were discovered in the Chertomlyk burial mound. This small number compared with other types perhaps suggests an earlier date, and plaques embossed with the same stamp, or at least a very similar one, have been found in the mid-fourth-century BC Scythian burial mounds of Tolstaya Mogila and Gaimanova Mogila. **AYUA**

Gold  
H. 2.9, W. 2.4 cm  
350–325 BC  
Chertomlyk burial mound, Dnieper, northern Black Sea (excavations by I. E. Zabelin, 1863)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1863 1/221

90

**Gold ornament with the head of a bird of prey**

This was one of thirteen such ornaments found during recent archaeological excavations at the cemetery of Taldy-2. The cemetery is thought to belong to elite individuals of a local nomad culture found in the steppe region of central Kazakhstan and known as the Tasmola culture. The site was initially dated to about the fifth or fourth century BC, but radiocarbon dates and stylistic parallels for these objects, as well as the huge number of other gold ornaments in the tomb, suggest an earlier date of the seventh or early sixth century BC and close connections with the Altai culture to the north.<sup>129</sup> **SUS**

H. 2.9, W. 1.5 cm; wt 9.35 g  
Burial mound 2, Taldy-2, Karkaraly district, Karagandy region, central Kazakhstan (excavations by A. Z. Beisenov, 2010–11)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, КРҮМТК1-1851/1,2

91

**Gold ornament with stylized eagle griffin**

H. 2.4, W. 4.4 cm; wt 21.75 g  
Burial mound 5, Taldy-2, Karkaraly district, Karagandy region, central Kazakhstan (excavations by A. Z. Beisenov, 2010–11)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, КРҮМТК1-1867





St J. Simpson & E. V. Stepanova

## **5 Eating, drinking and everyday life**





# Eating, drinking and everyday life

St J. Simpson & E. V. Stepanova

The Scyths call themselves nomads, as they have no houses but live in wagons. These are very small with four wheels. Others with six wheels are covered with felt; such wagons are employed like houses, in twos or threes and provide shelter from rain and wind ... The women and children live in these wagons, but the men always remain on horseback.<sup>1</sup>

This fifth-century BC description by an anonymous Greek author known as pseudo-Hippocrates illustrates the Scythian lifestyle. It also closely matches another passage by Herodotus:

The Scythians sent an advance guard of the best of their horsemen to meet Darius’ army. As for the wagons in which their children and wives lived, all these they sent forward, charged to drive ever northward; and with the wagons they sent all their flocks, keeping none back save such as were sufficient for their food.<sup>2</sup>

In this way of life, personal possessions have to be portable and durable, thus generally light and small or collapsible, and bags rather than boxes or cupboards are the storage containers of necessity. Objects are therefore often made of leather, cloth, felt or wood, and were probably made by a family member, but professional metalworkers were part of the local economy: the manufacture of tools, weapons and small personal ornaments does not require a large toolkit, and Siberia is rich in metal ores and alluvial gold. Pastoral nomads rely on hunting, gathering, fishing and herding, not only for food but also to provide raw materials for everyday goods and clothing, and their livestock also provided meat, dairy products, wool and hides.

The dependence on the horse led to the development of a comfortable riding costume suitable for everyday use, as described in Chapter 4. A combination of belted trousers and short tunic spread from Eurasia into all areas where horse riding was adopted, including Achaemenid Iran, where it became equated with the Medes and is depicted on reliefs and glazed brick panels alongside the Persian court dress of long belted robes. However, there were many different tribes, and Herodotus’ description of the different Scythian, Scythian-related and non-Scythian tribes living around the northern Black Sea gives a flavour of the complexity of detail. Different tribes practised different economic lifestyles in different ecozones, and local resources and traditions must have dictated local responses.

In the northern Black Sea region there was a mixed economy and close cultural connections with local Greek colonies. It is in this region that Herodotus encountered Scythians, and he was at pains to distinguish between the characteristics of different tribes, such as the Calipidae and the Alizones, who, ‘though in other matters they live like the Scythians, sow and eat corn, and onions, garlic, lentils, and millet’; further north were the ‘Scythian tillers of the land, who sow corn not for eating but for selling’, and to the east were ‘nomad Scythians, who sow nothing, nor plough’.<sup>3</sup> The nomadic economy is described by Megasthenes, cited by Arrian: ‘the non-agricultural Scythians ... wander in their wagons and move from one part of Scythia to another, not dwelling in cities and not reverencing shrines of the gods’.<sup>4</sup> In his description of the Massagetae tribes of the lower Amu darya (Oxus), who he states ‘are like the Scythians in their dress and manner of life’, Herodotus continues in similar vein: ‘They never sow; their fare is their livestock and the fish which they have in abundance



Fig. 105  
A light four-wheeled wagon from burial mound 5 at Pazyryk. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/404

Fig. 106  
Wheels and axle of a heavy wagon found in burial mound 5 at Pazyryk. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/332-335,1687/337

from the Araxes. Their drink is milk.’<sup>5</sup> Movement is a key feature of nomadic life but is far from random: it is determined by the weather, availability of fresh pasture and water, and local conditions such as the absence of horseflies and mosquitoes in summer.<sup>6</sup> One modern scholar summarized it as follows:

As supplies of water and pasture are exhausted, animals must be moved to fresh sources. Nomads must try to estimate the amount and quality of new pastures, as well as weather conditions, before moving their herds. Migration routes may be horizontal along lowlands; up and down between highlands and lowlands, depending on the different pastures available in winter and summer seasons; or they may circle or radiate from a central place. The nomadic lifestyle is thus a complex relationship between ancient, detailed knowledge about the natural environment: types of pasture, water sources and migratory routes, and contemporary sustainable behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

A mobile economy means that there is neither the need nor desire to build permanent infrastructure or ‘spoil’ grazing grounds with buildings: temporary structures suited to the different seasons and local environments were developed instead, and across Eurasia a variety of tents are attested over the centuries. The vast spaces of the Black Sea steppes allowed the nomads to take their houses on the road, using oxen to pull the wagons. Apart from small models, the evidence for wheeled vehicles is limited to the exceptional remains of a four-wheeled light vehicle found in tomb 5 at Pazyryk (fig. 105).<sup>8</sup> This had



a 3.2-m-long draught pole with wooden forks to allow the harnessing of the rear pair of two pairs of horses, and spoked wheels measuring 1.6 m across; it was found buried with the draught horses that pulled it. Elements of the design show that it was made as a functional vehicle designed not to overturn easily and, although unsuited to the high Altai where it was finally interred, it had clearly been used in another region, as there were heavy traces of wear on the felloes and abrasion on the axles, wheel sockets and harness holes in the yoke ends. The remains of trolleys with solid wooden wheels measuring 35–40 cm across, with solid axles, were also found in similar areas in tombs 1, 2, 3 and 5 (fig. 106).<sup>9</sup>

Both oxen and horses were used to transport dwellings, and this method was still used until recently in the Tuva and Altai regions of southern Siberia when temporary settlements were erected along the winter and summer routes, and the first structures to be erected were pens for livestock. These carts must have moved slowly, as do flocks of sheep and goat, and this explains the Scythian precaution in the face of Darius’ invasion, quoted above, where the horsemen served as their mobile guards and scouts.

Different types of structure were probably used in different seasons. During winter, in southern Siberia as recently as the last century the Yakuts used to live in square wood-framed earthen cabins, which were sunk into the ground to preserve warmth and accessed via notched log ladders. In summer they switched their herds to higher pastures and moved into heavy timber-framed conical tents, covered with birch-bark strips but left open at the apex to allow smoke to escape. The bark had been stripped off trees, softened



by boiling and sewn together in long sheets (fig. 107).<sup>10</sup> Archaeological finds from the Altai tombs provide other hints. The burial chambers at Pazyryk and Ak-Alakha were constructed of plain and dressed logs with the ends notched to interlock at the corners, and at Pazyryk mounds 2 and 5 the logs had been pre-marked for easy assembly. As in the main tomb chamber described earlier from Arzhan-2 (see Chapter 3), the floors were constructed of planks, while the roofs were sealed with sewn strips of bark and a layer of leaves of cinquefoil (*Dosiphora fruticosa*, known locally as ‘smoky tea’).<sup>11</sup>

Wooden logs from the blockhouse chamber of a burial on the Ukok plateau are thought to have been reused from an existing wooden structure of a polygonal shape, perhaps a dwelling.<sup>12</sup> Broad strips of larch and birch bark were used extensively to insulate the tops of the tomb chambers, and this implies that they were constructed in either the spring or the summer, as the bark cannot be stripped in such large sheets during other seasons. Moreover, in burial mound 3 at Pazyryk the excavators noted the presence of flowers of white-yellow scabious in the moss packing above the larch bark, and their stages of development showed that they had been gathered in early summer (late June or early July). The bark strips had been carefully sewn together, which suggests that they were also used in a non-funerary context, and continued to be used by local pastoral nomads as late as the twentieth century. All the finds prove that the ancient builders had a good knowledge of the insulation properties of

these materials. The complex construction at Arzhan-1 implies good woodworking building skills, and elements of the design resemble a yurt (fig. 108).

It is likely that yurts were used by the Scythian period; the earliest convincing textual references date to the second century BC and relate to the use by the Xiongnu of a ‘dome-shaped hut’ (*qionglu*) or ‘large felt tent’ (*zhanzhang*).<sup>13</sup> Further south, yurts are traditionally used in the slightly drier steppe regions of Central Asia, with only minor differences in the shape of the dome and felt covers reflecting different tribal or ethnic groups. The essence of a yurt is an easily assembled and dismantled lattice wall held together by a tension band, a domed roof (either semicircular or a truncated cone) and a roof ring or crown, covered with reeds and felts at the final stage (fig. 109). In each case, assembly is relatively quick, and after dismantling there are generally few visible traces remaining.

Within this environment, the normal way of life must have been to eat and sleep on floor coverings. As such, these and textiles are a major feature of nomadic furnishings, and it is telling that the only furniture in these tombs are low tables and solid blocks, which functioned either as pillows or as hard stools and were sometimes given leather covers (cat. 99).<sup>14</sup> The tables were carved from wood and consisted of an oval tray-like top with a low raised edge, supported on four separately made legs either turned on a lathe or hand carved and inserted by means of tenons (cats 100–101; fig. 111).<sup>15</sup> The stools were initially interpreted by the excavator as pillows, but they may have been

Fig. 107  
Traditional Altai region conical tents covered with birch bark, 1927. Similar structures were used by the excavators of Pazyryk.  
Archive of the Institute for the History of Material Culture, St Petersburg, O.3587.1

Fig. 108  
A modern yurt encampment in Kazakhstan.

intended primarily for seating rather than headrests.<sup>16</sup> The paucity of furniture was compensated for by soft furnishings. The tomb floors were covered in red or undyed felt covers and, in one exceptional case, a polychrome pile carpet was found with the horse burials outside the chamber at Pazyryk mound 5 (fig. 161). The tomb interiors at Pazyryk and Arzhan-2 were also originally hung with felts, although most had either been pulled down when they were looted or fallen through decay. The famous large felt hanging from Pazyryk mound 5 (fig. 110) had been intended to hang vertically, perhaps with poles threaded through the points where there are tears in the felt, and as its full height of 4.5 m is greater than the 1.4 m height of the tomb chamber, it must have hung in either a large yurt or an open-air enclosure.<sup>17</sup> In his description of a bald-headed tribe living in the north Caucasus, Herodotus perhaps hints at a local version of this type of construction, where the individuals sheltered ‘under a tree, covering it in winter with a white felt cloth, but using no felt in summer’.<sup>18</sup>

Felt was an ingenious invention. It is an excellent insulation material as it retains heat and absorbs damp. Warm, soft, flexible, breathable and light, it was also used for clothing and headdresses, protective cases for objects, horse gear and three-dimensional sculpted images. According to pseudo-Hippocrates, Scythian dwellings were covered in felt, which was both rain- and windproof.<sup>19</sup> Felt was probably invented soon after the domestication of sheep, is attested in Mesopotamian cuneiform sources as early as the third millennium BC and continues to be a popular local handicraft across Central Asia. Sheep are sheared here in the spring and autumn: the former produces a long-hair wool, which is good for spinning and carpets; the latter results in a short-hair wool more

suitable for felting.<sup>20</sup> However, feltworking is demanding: it requires cleaning and sorting of the wool; beating it in order to fluff it and enable it to be laid evenly (fig. 112); arranging it in several layers with the patterns and border last; watering it to help bind the fibres; rolling it tightly like a carpet; and finally solidifying the roll by pressing with the forearms, kicking or repeatedly dragging by a horse. The finds from Pazyryk show that felt had many uses, including coiled rings used as stabilizing place mats for holding rounded containers, in one case sewn onto a floor covering (cats 102–103), a cushion stuffed with deer hair, covers for hexapod stands (cat. 92), a pointed cap, a hooded caftan, stockings (cat. 51), sweat-absorbing horse blankets and horse headgear (cat. 162). Different types of wool are attested too, including yak wool in mounds 2 and 5, sheep wool in all tombs, complete fleeces in mounds 2 and 5 (cat. 97) and a goatskin in mound 5.<sup>21</sup>

Wood was carved into such vessels as rounded wooden drinking bowls with separately carved horn handles terminating in a horse’s hoof (cat. 105; see also fig. 115); traces of adze marks can be seen on the interiors of some of these bowls. A more recent excavation of an ordinary burial mound at Moinak-2 in the Bertek valley of the Ukok plateau, radiocarbon-dated to between 390 and 170 BC, produced a large oval platter raised on four small legs: the excavators observed that it had multiple knife scratches and cuts on the top from prolonged use.<sup>22</sup> A slightly rounded wooden mug measuring 14.5 cm high was also found at Pazyryk mound 2.<sup>23</sup> At sites outside the high Altai region these organic containers do not survive, but recent excavations of royal burial mounds at Filippovka in the southern Urals prove their existence, as the gold and silver overlays and handles originally attached to wooden vessels were still present.<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 109  
A late or post-Scythian (Tagar or later) petroglyph from Boyar in the Yenisei valley showing a row of structures with domed roofs with radiating spokes, rectilinear doors and what appears to be log construction for the walls.





Fig. 110  
Large felt hanging from burial mound 5 at Pazyryk. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/94

Small amounts of pottery were placed as grave goods in tombs in the southern Altai, but these vessels were imported from settlements in the forest-steppe region 500 km or more away.<sup>25</sup> They include elegant handmade and lightly burnished flasks (cat. 104), sometimes decorated in paint, by incision or in low relief; in one exceptional case from Pazyryk mound 2 a row of cockerels made from leather cutouts was pasted onto a broad band of very thin leather applied over the upper part of the flask and highlighted with tin foil (fig. 113).<sup>26</sup> In rare instances figural designs occur, such as a griffin on a vase from Bertek (Ukok) and an ibex incised among volute designs on another from Kizil (fig. 114).<sup>27</sup> The excavators remarked that if these had contained curds or whey, or another drink made from cows' milk, then visible traces should have survived because of the frozen contexts in which they were found, so they suggested that they were used to drink the mildly alcoholic drink made from fermented mare's milk (koumiss).<sup>28</sup> This has very high vitamin content, especially vitamin C, and is good for the blood and regulation of gastric acid. In recent times some mares were kept specifically for their milk, and were milked several times a day. Herodotus describes how 'when milking is done, they pour the milk into deep wooden buckets, and make the slaves to stand

about the buckets and shake the milk; the surface part of it they draw off, and this they most value; what lies at the bottom is less esteemed';<sup>29</sup> William of Rubruck explains this in slightly greater detail following his trip to the Mongols in 1253/55:

The Mongols pour mares' milk into a large skin or bag and they begin churning it with a specially made stick which is as big as a man's head at its lower end, and hollowed out; and when they beat it quickly it begins to bubble like new wine and to turn sour and ferment, and they churn it until they can extract the butter. Then they taste it and when it is pungent they drink it ... It greatly delights the inner man; it even intoxicates those who have not a very good head. It also greatly provokes urine.<sup>30</sup>

Feasting was an important part of Scythian funeral ceremonies. Analogy with later Eurasian nomad practice, from at least Mongol times until the present day, suggests it had a serving hierarchy according to status and age, with different cuts and dishes served accordingly.<sup>31</sup> Herodotus states that, following the death of an ordinary individual, the body was placed in a cart and taken around the closest families for a forty-day mourning period, 'setting before the dead

man about as much of the fare as he serves to the rest'.<sup>32</sup> Darius' invasion of the Black Sea region in about 513 BC led to a conference of the leaders of eight major Scythian tribes, and the results of their deliberations were sent by messenger 'to their neighbours'.<sup>33</sup> The threat of non-observance and a consequent breakdown in social cohesion is implicit. In the Black Sea region, in the Caucasus and on the edge of Central Asia, the Scythians had contact with the wine-drinking cultures of the Assyrians, Achaemenids and Greeks, which explains finds of Achaemenid-inspired wine pourers (*rhyta*) in Scythian-related tombs at Kul' Oba (cat. 209), Athenian drinking cups of silver and black-glazed pottery in Scythian tombs (cats 114, 194) and rows of up to fifteen Greek amphorae still containing tell-tale reddish residues (cat. 115) in the large burial mounds. Greek authors commented on how the Scythians, like the Persians, liked to drink to excess:

Come, my boy, give me the goblet,  
In one draught it shall be emptied!  
In the jug mix ten parts water,  
Five parts wine thou shalt add to it.  
I would be intoxicated,  
Not gripped in maenadic frenzy.

Fig. 111  
Using a lathe to turn wood.

Fig. 112  
Fluffing wool in order to make felt; photograph taken in 1899. Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences 1199-433



Let us not again this evening  
With our shouts and noisy uproar  
Get ourselves as drunk as Scythians,  
Let's get moderately tipsy  
And our best songs sing with fervour.<sup>34</sup>

As herders the Scythians had easy access to mutton, beef and horsemeat, which are high in protein and relatively low in carbohydrates, and have easily digestible fat. However, the extent and type of meat consumed may have varied according to tribe, region and season: some modern nomadic societies only slaughter animals for special occasions, whereas others cull a large part of the sheep herd in late autumn or early winter. This allows most meat to be treated and preserved by drying, smoking or freezing as a winter supply when pasturage is scarcer and winter pasturage is only half as nutritious as spring vegetation.<sup>35</sup> The sacrum and/or vertebrae from rams, cows and horses have been found inside Scythian tombs, but mutton appears to have been the commonest form of meat, and is implied in Herodotus' description of how the Achaemenid emperor Cyrus was advised on how the related Massagetae tribes might be easily distracted:



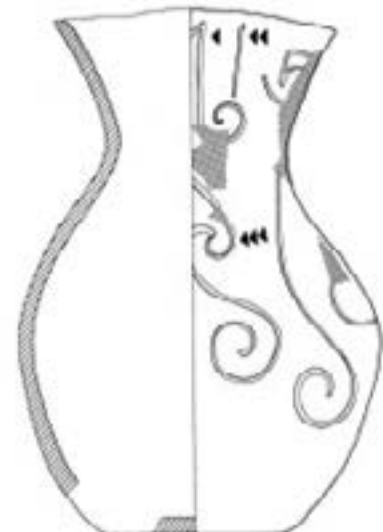


Fig. 113  
Cutout leather appliqué figures of cocks, attached to a pottery vessel from Pazyryk mound 2.

Fig. 114  
Incised designs showing volutes and an ibex on a pottery vase excavated in a burial mound at Kizil.

I counsel you to cut up the flesh of many of your sheep and goats into portions unstintingly, and to cook it and serve it as a feast in our camp, providing many bowls of unmixed wine withal and all manner of food. Then let your army withdraw to the river again, leaving behind that part of it which is of least account. For if I err not in my judgment, when the Massagetae see so many good things they will betake them to feasting thereon.<sup>36</sup>

they cast all the flesh into the victim's stomach, adding water thereto, and make a fire beneath of the bones, which burn finely; the stomachs easily hold the flesh when it is stripped of the bones; thus an ox serves to cook itself.<sup>39</sup>

Although this may seem strange, there is a very long tradition of using greasy or fatty bones as fuel, beginning in the Upper Palaeolithic period, and wood fuel is heavy and less easily procured by mobile societies. Different fuels have different properties, but experimental combustions show that mixed bone and wood fires significantly increase the combustion time and therefore extend limited wood-fuel resources; moreover, bone fuel generates heat and light with little smoke, and would have been ideal for drying and curing hides as well as using within tents or other enclosed spaces.<sup>40</sup> Separate experiments show that cooking in a paunch is also possible.<sup>41</sup> Large, sturdy cast copper-alloy cauldrons are frequent finds in Scythian tombs, though not at Pazyryk, where they were probably removed, along with other precious items, when these tombs were robbed. They are typically rounded, have a pair of tall looped handles on the top of the rim and are raised on three legs; some are decorated and had their surfaces polished after casting (cats 111–12).<sup>42</sup> An exceptional find from modern Kazakhstan is unusual as the surfaces are so rough that it must have been interred immediately after casting.

Cauldrons were presumably used to prepare stews containing large cuts of meat, and one found in the burial mound at Gaimanova held as much as 140

The sheep at Pazyryk were of the slight fat-tailed variety, which was highly valued: the excavator cited his specialist, Prof. S. N. Bogolyubsky, in concluding that they were a hardy variety capable of considerable travel (cat. 110).<sup>37</sup> It has been noted from other sites that, as there are no traces of cutting or chopping on the portions left as grave offerings, these parts must have been detached from already processed carcasses.<sup>38</sup> Herodotus stated that the Scythians boiled their meat in cauldrons or bags, and also remarked that they used bones as fuel:

having strangled and flayed the beast, he sets about cooking it. Now the Scythian land is wondrous bare of wood: so this is their device for cooking the flesh. When they have flayed the victims, they strip the flesh from the bones and throw it into the cauldrons of the country, if they have such: these are the most like to Lesbian bowls, save that they are much bigger; into these they then throw the flesh, and cook it by lighting a fire beneath with the bones of the victims. But if they have no cauldron, then



Fig. 115  
Wooden bowl with a handle in the shape of a horse's head. Grave 4, Chinge-Tei burial mound, Tuva. H. 8, diam. 12, W. with handle 18 cm. Sixth century BC. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

litres.<sup>43</sup> Organic residue analyses of porous pottery vessels might yield information, but are unlikely to be useful with metal cauldrons; an attempt to use soil analysis to demonstrate the use of bouillon in early Sarmatian burials at Prokhorovka is unconvincing,<sup>44</sup> but the discovery of wooden spoons inside wooden bowls at Aymyrlyg suggests that some form of soup or stew was consumed.<sup>45</sup> Incidentally, cauldrons must also have been used to boil the bark used as insulation or for the manufacture of small containers (cats 188, 250).

Meat was important, but there were other elements to the diet too. Pastoral nomads rely heavily on the secondary products of milk, butter and cheese, particularly during the spring and summer months when their herds are lactating. In burial mound 5 at Pazyryk the excavators found remains of cheese, and an elaborate decorated leather bag placed with a horse burial outside burial mound 2 also contained cheese (cat. 109). Biomolecular analyses are at an early stage for Scythian studies, but scientific analysis of skeletal remains from a cemetery at Aymyrlyg in southern Siberia showed that bony lesions on four individuals were a result of gastrointestinal infections caused by bovine tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium bovis*).<sup>46</sup> This is the first time such an infection has been identified archaeologically and implies that the population continued to rely on cattle, probably as a source of traction as well as a source of meat and milk: the most likely cause is either the consumption of infected meat or unpasteurized milk or via another species that acted as a reservoir for the disease, such as lambs or kids fed on cow's milk during harsh

winters when grazing was difficult.<sup>47</sup> As bovine tuberculosis is not self-sustaining in humans, the different occurrences reflect continued exposure to infected animal hosts; the individuals concerned would have experienced high temperatures, diarrhoea, stomach pains and weight loss, and probably addressed these by drinking large quantities of koumiss, as that was the most effective treatment for tuberculosis in Russia before antibiotics were discovered.<sup>48</sup>

Climatic restraints, the low productivity of the pastoral economy, and internecine fighting probably kept populations at relatively low levels. The study of skeletal remains provides more information on diet and ill health. The examination of the dental pathology of a young Scythian man excavated at Sebýstei in the Altai region in 1996 revealed a distinctive wear of the lateral incisors associated with the chewing of very abrasive foodstuffs such as tubers, and evidence that he suffered from periodontitis suggests he either lacked good dental hygiene, had a diet involving sticky foods, or suffered from a lack of vitamin C.<sup>49</sup> Ethnographers have noted that lily bulbs and edible roots were an important gathered resource in the Tuva region during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and each family usually gathered several dozen kilograms for consumption over the lean winter months.<sup>50</sup> Judging by the so-called 'deficiency lines' on their tooth enamel, lack of nourishment in childhood was also true of the 'queen' from grave Arzhan-2 and a woman aged twenty or twenty-one from grave 22 at the same site, and perhaps reflects a strict hierarchical system whereby adults were given priority access to good-quality food over children; this would be consistent with more recent nomad practice.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, a strongly built man from grave 24 at the same site had heavy wear to his tooth crowns and abscesses in as many as seven of his upper teeth, which are symptoms consistent with a meaty diet poor in carbohydrates.<sup>52</sup>

That not everyone enjoyed an entirely healthy life is proved by recent findings from the additional scientific analysis of human remains excavated at Arzhan-2, which indicate that the forty- to fifty-year-old 'king' suffered from and probably died of prostate cancer; moreover, the extent of metastasis implies he must have spent his last months bedridden, presumably carried on a couch. This is currently the earliest attested case of this disease and proof that this type



of cancer is neither modern nor a product of the western lifestyle, as is sometimes suggested.<sup>53</sup> It is not the only instance of such a disease, as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan of the mummified remains of a twenty-year-old woman found at Ak-Alakha-3 showed she was suffering from terminal breast cancer when at a late stage she had injuries consistent with a bad fall from a horse.<sup>54</sup>

The Scythians bred horses, large and small cattle, sheep and goats, and possibly also yaks in the Altai region. These provided the nomads with produce and the raw materials for building their dwellings and making clothes. Wool was used for weaving cloth and making felt; sheepskins were made into short coats sewn with sinew thread. A shepherd’s way of life with frequent nights in the open air demanded warm all-weather clothing. Archaeological finds from the Altai region show that in Scythian times fine-fleeced sheep were bred alongside coarser-fleeced ones: the former provided fluff for cloth and fine types of felt; the latter supplied wool for felt rugs and wall hangings.<sup>55</sup> A herding economy also generates a rich source of leather. The exceptional state of preservation of finds at Pazyryk illustrates some of its many uses, ranging from horse harnesses to items of everyday use such as durable lightweight pouches, purses and bags, which varied in shape from square pouches to small bags with a leather drawstring; some were left plain but others were decorated with cutout appliqués.<sup>56</sup> Silver- and copper-alloy tanged disc mirrors were found in leopard-skin and leather pouches, which probably not only protected them from scratching but reduced the rate of tarnish.<sup>57</sup> The presence of furs belonging to cheetahs, leopards, sables, squirrels and foxes proves hunting and the trade or gift of furs between peoples in different ecozones of woodland, mountain and desert steppe.

Bone carving was another highly developed craft: bone and horn were carved into small containers (cat. 55), decorative belt buckles or other fittings (cats 76–77), handles (cat. 105) and spoons (cat. 108).<sup>58</sup> Metapodial bones of hoofed animals, such as horses, oxen and elk, were used to make arrows, which were in as much demand as those made of bronze or iron. Red deer and elk antlers were used to carve belt buckles, cheekpieces, various plaques, ornaments, fasteners and even tools for working leather and wood, and the analysis of a series of horse-harness buckles

found at Berel-11 shows them to have been carved from the horn of hunted Siberian red deer.<sup>59</sup> Horn is removed from the underlying bony core by soaking for a long period, followed by boiling and gentle heating to soften it, scraping to remove blemishes and boiling again for a final softening before carving. It is a very tough yet elastic material (fig. 116).<sup>60</sup> These nomads were also good at woodworking, and the techniques for carving wood are the same. As described earlier, the burial chambers were constructed of carefully measured logs made of whole trunks and beams and fitted together in different ways. Massive coffins were carved from 300-year-old larch trees and sometimes complex designs were incised onto the lids; the nomads built different types of carts, carved wooden utensils, and assembled complex ornaments for horse gear and personal attire.

The nomads also made their own weapons. In the Scythian period, iron was the preferred material, despite Herodotus’ statement in connection with the Massagetae that ‘iron and silver they never use’.<sup>61</sup> These iron objects (*akinakes*, daggers, knives and even arrows) were sometimes decorated in a very distinctive manner with gold or silver overlays (cats 129, 134, 140). High-quality iron swords and daggers were greatly prized and used for years (cats 138, 141). Normal graves often contain small bronze imitations or models of weapons rather than the actual articles, which suggests that these families either chose or could not afford to dispense with the original. Bronze casting had also been developed to a high standard and was used to make cauldrons (cats 111–12), braziers (cat. 94), bridle and saddle elements, mirrors, ornaments and even nails (cat. 186). Along with the better-crafted and artistic objects, there are a large number of rather sloppy so-called ‘stand-in’ objects made specifically for burials. As well as the bulkier cast jewelry, the nomadic craftsmen added fine gold and lead (as a substitute for silver) foil as overlays on bronze, wood, bone and leather objects, to create an opulent but light ornament. This ensured minimal use of the precious materials, while serving to perpetuate the myth of the abundance of gold in the nomadic east. Where possible the nomads used local resources for smelting iron, copper and gold, judging by the comparison of the finished artefacts with the original ore composition. For example, the people of the Pazyryk area used the Altai ore with antimony and

Fig. 116  
Silver mirror with horn handle  
from burial mound 2 at Pazyryk.  
Diam. 15, L. of handle 11.5 cm.  
Late fourth to early third  
century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1684/89



arsenic alloys in bronze smelting, while gold with 20% silver was extracted from local placer deposits. While most everyday utensils were made of sturdy materials, namely bronze for cooking and wood for dining and use in dairy production, the nomads also used locally made pottery vessels, as well as more exotic wares: some burial mounds around the northern Black Sea contained Greek painted pottery and metal dishes, while burials from Bashadar burial mound 1 and Shibe in the Altai region contain examples of Chinese lacquer. No metal vessels have yet been found in Altai, doubtless because of extensive looting in the past rather than burial practice or social preference. However, the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great does include vessels that may have originated in the Near East, and this applies also to some other vessels found in burial mounds in the Urals and present-day Kazakhstan (cat. 215).

# Getting as high as a Scythian

A Scythian ritual involved the deliberate inhalation of the smoke from charred hemp. Its pleasurable effects are described in great detail by Herodotus:

They anoint and wash their heads; as for their bodies, they set up three poles leaning together to a point and cover these over with woollen mats; then, in the place so enclosed to the best of their power, they make a pit in the centre beneath the poles and the mats and throw red-hot stones into it. They have hemp growing in their country, very like flax, save that the hemp is by much the thicker and taller ... The Scythians then take the seed of this hemp and, creeping under the mats, they throw it on the red-hot stones; and, being so thrown, it smoulders and sends forth so much steam that no Greek vapour-bath could surpass it. The Scythians howl in their joy at the vapour-bath. This serves them instead of bathing, for they never wash their bodies with water.<sup>62</sup>

Finds from the larger Pazyryk burial mounds confirm Herodotus, as they include framework rods, miniature tents, braziers, singed stones and even hemp seeds. Hexapods (frames made of six rods and positioned over a brazier) were present in all of the larger burial mounds, and the second burial mound at Pazyryk had two braziers, concealed from looters by the thick layer of ice inside the tomb.

Herodotus describes hemp smoking as a cleansing ritual performed after a chieftain's funeral, but it might have been employed more widely in cleansing rituals accompanying more everyday events.<sup>63</sup> This is evident in the individual ownership of smoking sets by men and women. N. V. Polosmak suggests that the use of braziers for smoking hemp might have caused 'bronze fever', which heightened its ecstatic effects but also caused the accumulation of copper in the body. Mineral analysis of the hair of ancient nomads from the Ukok plateau revealed a significant shift of the copper/zinc balance, with elevated levels of copper. Zinc deficiency caused by excessive levels of copper can stunt growth, overwhelm the nervous system, and cause fatigue, swelling of mucous membranes and hair loss. Interestingly, this imbalance is not found in Pazyryk horses, and the present-day inhabitants of these territories also show healthy levels of both elements. Moreover, the levels of copper in the charred hemp discovered in the second burial mound at Pazyryk are three times higher than in fresh seed. This phenomenon may also be explained by the common use of copper-alloy utensils. **EVS**



## 92 Possible felt cover for a hexapod

This once circular object from the third burial mound at Pazyryk was sewn from several sections of undyed felt, with a hem and a cord loop in the centre (see detail). It may have been used as a felt cover from a hemp-smoking set. Fragments of felt found scattered around a hexapod in the south-west corner of the chamber of the second burial mound at Pazyryk might also be, according to S. I. Rudenko, the remains of the felt cover of the hexapod (see fig. 117).<sup>64</sup> Other types of covers were also used: a second hemp-smoking set, placed in the centre of this burial chamber, had been covered with a small leather rug decorated with appliqué and measuring 170 by 155 cm across. Judging by its condition – most of its middle section is missing – it would have been thrown over the tops of the six rods rather than wrapped around them. The comparison between the size of the felt and leather covers and the length of the wooden rods of the

hexapod, which range between 110 and 120 cm, indicates that the hems of the covers would not have reached the ground. Perhaps this was not essential and would allow the smoke to spread low across the ground. Although the hemp-smoking sets have only been found in chieftains' graves, Herodotus' account and the mineral content found in the hair of normal people suggest that the practices around hemp smoking would have involved entire communities. **EVS**

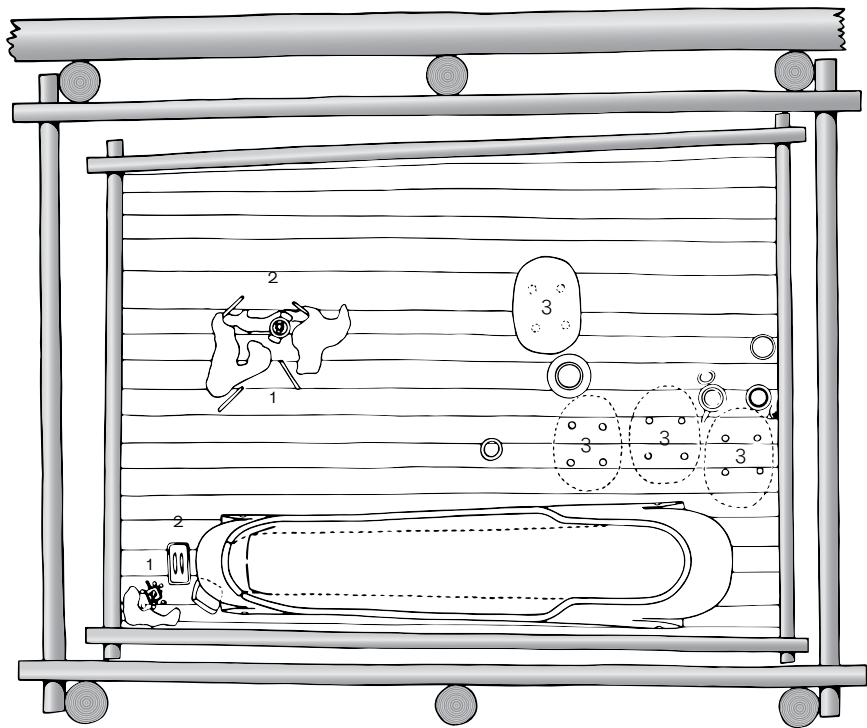
Felt, textile  
Diam. 102 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 3, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1685/12



Hexapod stand

The remains of hexapod stands were found in each of the tombs at Pazyryk, and two cast copper-alloy braziers were also found in tomb 2, each containing stones and hemp seeds.<sup>66</sup> The present set includes a frame made of six rods, originally held together with a strap threaded through the holes at the top of the rods, and a brazier. Bird-cherry bark had been glued to the rods and coils around their full length; hexapod rods from other burials all appear to be decorated in the same way. Fragments of the felt cover also survived.<sup>66</sup> **EVS**

Wood, leather  
L. 118–19 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/117



Arsenical copper brazier

This was cast using the lost-wax technique, and X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis of the base gives the following composition: copper with 1–2% arsenic, 1–2% antimony, 0.6–0.7% nickel, and traces of iron, bismuth and silver. This arsenical copper composition was common in the Pazyryk culture (cat. 186). Seams imply it was cast in several stages or in a piece mould, and a casting fault on the underside was fixed with a welded patch. The surface was never polished after casting. The second burial mound at Pazyryk produced two hemp-smoking sets, one for each of the two buried bodies (a man and a woman). The copper brazier from the second set was shaped to resemble a Scythian cauldron on a conical tray, with its handles wrapped with birch bark. A leather flask containing hemp seeds was tied to one of the hexapod's rods (cat. 95). The hexapod itself was covered with a leather rug with appliqué. The brazier contained singed stones and charred hemp seeds. **EVS**

H. 8, L. 11.6, W. 12.3 cm; L. 8.3 cm (handle)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/121

Fig. 117  
Plan of the interior of the chamber of burial mound 2 at Pazyryk showing the location of the hexapods (1), braziers (2) and tables (3).



Hemp seeds

These were stored in a flat rounded leather flask with a narrow neck (fig. 118). This is extraordinarily beautiful and was made by sewing together two large pieces of leather with a smaller strip along the side. The seams are laced with folded strips of leather. The two flat sides of the flask have patches of appliqué sewn onto them and show scenes of a fantastic eagle mauling a bird resembling a goose. A scene with similar birds is depicted on the sides of a headdress belonging to the man found in the same tomb (cats 36–37). Each appliqué was carefully cut from a single piece of fine leather and stitched with sinew thread. A strap for attaching the flask to the hexapod is sewn to the side of the neck.<sup>67</sup> Charred hemp seeds were also found in both of the copper braziers from the same burial mound (cat. 92). **EVS**

L. 0.3 cm (each)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684D/8

Fig. 118  
Leather flask containing hemp seeds. H. 16, W. 14 cm. Burial mound 2, Pazyryk  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/87



Coriander seeds

These seeds were found inside a leather bag. Seeds of coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), hemp and hart's clover have been found in several burial mounds, including Arzhan-2, Pazyryk and burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 (see pp. 100–101). Coriander is attested archaeologically from the Makran region (south-west Pakistan) from the second half of the third millennium BC and was widely used in Egyptian and Mesopotamian cookery.<sup>68</sup> It grows wild in Central Asia and it was probably from that region that these seeds were brought as they do not grow in the Altai area. The excavator drew attention to their medicinal and aromatic properties, and finds in the 'royal' grave at Arzhan-2 suggest that such herbs and spices were valued for culinary or medicinal purposes.<sup>69</sup> However, in other excavations at Ak-Alakha-3 charred seeds were found within an incense burner, which proved that they were burned as part of a ritual rather than simply being used as a condiment, and the excavator suggested the purpose was to disguise the smell of decomposition.<sup>70</sup> **SUS**

L. 0.4 cm (each)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/2





Sheepskin

This is an exceptional archaeological survival, as a fleece is an everyday item which either rarely survives or is not usually placed in a tomb where it would be preserved. Sheep- and goatskins were found in this tomb and another sheepskin was found in the second Pazyryk burial mound. Both come from fine-fleece breeds and are made up entirely of fine down, with fibres of 10 to 14 µm, comparable in quality to modern-day yarn breeds.<sup>71</sup> Sheep- and goatskins were probably processed with soured milk and cottage cheese, and hand kneaded.<sup>72</sup> The characteristics of the fleece from these skins coincide with those from the many simple linen or twill-woven cloths found in the larger burial mounds at Pazyryk (see p. 123). The same high-quality yarn was used for embroidery thread, as well as for knitting braid decorations and matting the fine Pazyryk felt. Thicker felt was made from the yarn of semi-fine-fleeced sheep (fibre width up to 70 µm), which means that different breeds of sheep must have been kept in Altai during the Scythian period. In comparison with the cloths from the larger Pazyryk burial mounds, the Ukok ones are of somewhat poorer quality and reflect the differences in the social ranks of the deceased. All of the braided cords and laces and many of the woollen cloths and felts from Ukok contain camel hair



(5–20%), which added durability.<sup>73</sup> Four methods of fleece extraction for yarn are known from antiquity: collecting by hand during moulting, brushing with a comb, cutting off the fleece with a knife or trimming with shears. During the analysis of the wool fibres from the Pazyryk textiles, no hair follicles were found, which suggests that the wool was collected by either cutting or trimming.<sup>74</sup> No tools connected with textile manufacturing have ever been found in any of the Pazyryk burials. However, it is usual for these graves not to contain any implements other than shovels and picks used in their construction.

Sheep were an essential part of the pastoral nomadic economy, and the 1931 census of nomads in Tuva showed that up to 75% of the stock were sheep. Sheep move slowly, but mixing them with goats helps keep them together and eases flock management. Both are hardy animals and easier to maintain than cattle, but because they close crop vegetation during grazing they quickly exhaust pasturage, and must be regularly moved in order to allow the grass to recover. Care must have been taken to reach good pastures each spring when the lambing season began and the ewes were milked daily to produce as much as 65 litres over the entire lactation period. Once an animal is slaughtered the sheepskin is quickly removed in a few minutes with a sharp knife (fig. 119). In Tuva, S. Vainshtein also recorded how the local pastoralists initially

processed sheepskins by drying them for one or two days, either by pegging them out flesh-side upwards in summer or freezing them in snow during winter. The flesh side was then cleaned by scraping for several hours, periodically wetting either with sour milk or the soured whey left over from making koumiss, allowing it to dry before further dressing, smoking for four or five days, tanning and then given a final dressing.<sup>75</sup> **EVS, SUS**

Sheepskin  
L. 65, W. 50 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 5, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1687/86



Fig. 119  
Removing a sheepskin with a knife, Kyrgyzstan.



98

## Looped rug

Burial mound 2 at Pazyryk contained fragments from two coverlets or carpets made of woollen cloth. These were originally strips about 42 cm wide and woven with a single warp and two wefts, the thicker one of which formed loops on the face. A single thread of this thick weft was followed by several threads of the second, thinner, one at a rate of up to thirty threads per centimetre.<sup>76</sup> The cloth was dyed various shades of red with a pigment derived from cochineal insects. Similar cloths were found at Pazyryk-3 and Bashadar-2, where they covered the bottom of the coffins (over a layer of felt) and the bodies of the corpses. These sites span a period of some three centuries and imply that such textiles either belong to a well-established local craft or were imported over a long period of time. **EVS**

Wool

H. 120, W. 228 cm

Late fourth to early third century BC

Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/4



Pillow and pillowcase

Bean- or figure-of-eight-shaped wooden pillows like this are common in the burials of Pazyryk chieftains and noblemen. A pillow from burial mound 1 at Tuekta even had a special compartment to contain the hair of the corpse. It is uncertain whether they were used in real life; as they are uncomfortable to rest on, the surfaces were generally left unsmoothed, and some have sharp edges, it is more likely they were made especially for the tombs. At burial mound 2 at Pazyryk and burial mound 1 at Tuekta they were found at the upper end of the coffins and this led the excavator to assume that they functioned as seats to which leather cases had been added for greater comfort.<sup>77</sup> However, in more recent excavations of intact high-status burials, for example burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-1, such pieces are always found under the head of the deceased.<sup>78</sup> Commoners' burials of the Pazyryk culture, for example at Ulandryk, Tashanta and Sailiugem in the Altai region, contain pillows of unworked stone or examples made of wood or leather filled with branches of *Pentaphylloides fruticosa* (a hardy deciduous flowering shrub);<sup>79</sup> a felt pillow from a man's burial in burial mound 1 at Verkh-Kal'dzhin-2 was stuffed with aromatic

*Ziziphora clinopodioides*, another common shrub,<sup>80</sup> and a small pillow under the head of a woman's mummy in burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 was stuffed with wool.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the wooden pillows, some burial mounds – including burial mounds 2 and 5 at Pazyryk – also contained smaller wool-stuffed felt or fur examples, but their original position and use remain unclear. The leather case from burial mound 2 at Pazyryk remains the only one of its kind. The case is made of two large and several smaller pieces of thin leather that were sewn together with sinew thread and ornamented with coloured leather appliqué; only fragments of this remain on the top. **EVS**

Wood, leather, sinew  
L. 39.5, W. 19.5, H. 11.5 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/33, 34



Wooden table

Collapsible tables were a standard feature in the tombs at Pazyryk and as many as four were found in burial mound 2 (see fig. 117). They vary in height from 18 to 47 cm but share the same feature of a tray-like oval top with a low raised edge, and four lathe-turned or hand-carved legs; these had a tenon at the top of each which was inserted into a mortise, and sometimes secured either with a piece of thin leather wrapped around the tenon or held in place with a small wedge. A leg from burial mound 1 had remains of tin foil and fine birch-bark overlays, and all the table tops from burial mound 2 were coloured red with cinnabar. When the tomb was robbed the intruders used these tables as blocks for hacking off the heads of the corpses and the right hand and legs of the woman, leaving axe blows on the top of one table.<sup>82</sup> **SUS**

Wood  
H. 34.6 cm; L. 67.5, W. 54 cm (table top)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/36a



Wooden table leg carved in the shape of a feline predator

Wood  
H. 36 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/41





102

### Felt ring

Separate felt rings were found in two of the tombs at Pazyryk and were intended to steady the bases of full drinking vessels (fig. 120). The rings vary in diameter from 14 to 18.5 cm. They were made of twisted strips of fairly thick undyed black or white felt wrapped in fine red felt, and sewn with twisted or plaited sinew. **EVS**

Felt

Diam. 14, H. 2 cm

Late fourth to early third century BC

Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1295/86

Fig. 120

Wooden drinking cup with animal leg-shaped handle and felt ring. Vessel: H. 13.5, diam. 15.3 cm; ring: diam. 19.5 cm. Burial mound 2, Pazyryk

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

1684/47–48



103

### Felt ring sewn onto a floor covering

Most felt rings were separate and functioned like place mats that could be used freely and in any combination. This example is different, as it is the only one from Pazyryk that was sewn onto a floor covering. It was made from undyed felt onto which were sewn fine yellowish and reddish felt appliques (only partly surviving), which were decorated with small woollen thread circles. A black undyed felt ring, sheathed with fine reddish felt and measuring 20 cm across, was sewn onto the corner of the covering, of which only this portion survives.<sup>83</sup> **EVS**

Felt

L. 32 cm; diam. 18–20 cm (ring)

Late fourth to early third century BC

Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

1684/50–51



Pottery flask

This rather elegant restored pot was found in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk. Each of the tombs at this site had one or two vessels of this type placed as grave goods. A unique example also found in burial mound 2 had been decorated with six thick leather cutouts showing the silhouette of a cockerel, which had been glued onto the sides; the outer surfaces of each cutout had been covered with bright tin foil (fig. 113), just as on the coffin from burial mound 1 (cats 181–83). These flasks were handmade, lightly burnished and fired in open bonfire-type kilns, judging by their mottled appearance. There are no visible traces of residue inside, but the excavator believed them to have been used to hold koumiss.<sup>84</sup>

EVS

Pottery  
H. 28 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/53



Wooden drinking bowl

This bowl is typical of the Altai culture. The handle was made of horn and the detail on the left shows how it was originally also decorated with appliques attached to the outside. A similar wooden drinking bowl found in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk had the handle wrapped in gold foil with a hole through it so that it could be suspended by a strap,<sup>85</sup> and another was found next to the woman's body in the royal grave at Arzhan-2.<sup>86</sup> In everyday tombs in the Scythian cemetery at Aymyrlig, most of the wooden containers belonged to oval dishes and bowls, sometimes with a flat horizontal handle, and they were often placed as sets.<sup>87</sup> **sus**

Wood  
H. 13, L. with handle 25 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound 1, Tuekta, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 2179/983

Ornament from a wooden vessel

The vessel from which this ornament comes had a rounded base, which may mean that it was continuously held during some sort of ritual or that it was placed on a circular support like the felt rings found in the Pazyryk tombs. Gold mounts for the upper parts of such vessels were first found in the Kelermes burial mounds, which are the earliest Scythian monuments in the northern Caucasus. The upper edge of this plaque is now partly broken but was originally turned over the rim of the vessel and held in place with five rivets. The representation of an anthropomorphic figure grappling lions is found in the art of the Hittites and ancient Iran; the large nose, rounded eye and ear, and the plait at the back of the head resemble a feature on reliefs from Zincirli and Carchemish, as well as some Luristan bronzes. The latter also feature winged figures, yet

these are more characteristic of the art of the eastern Greeks. The present example is paralleled by the winged deities on a drinking horn and a mirror excavated at Kelermes by D. G. Schultz. Although these two pieces are contemporary with the orientalizing and archaic phases of Greek art during the seventh and sixth centuries BC, the rounded outline of the lower edge on the Kelermes plaque might indicate a later, fifth century BC, date.

TVR

Chased and pierced gold  
L. 4.2 cm  
Seventh to fifth century BC  
Destroyed burial mound near the hamlet of Tuskaya, Kuban region, northern Caucasus  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 2537/11



Pottery vessel with relief decoration in the form of spiral horns

Small numbers of pottery flasks, jars and bowls were regularly placed with the dead. These were handmade and unevenly fired: the partial blackening implies they were fired in bonfire kilns where the pottery came into direct contact with the fuel. Decoration was simple but in some cases included light incision, grooving, painting or applied coils, as on this example from the Scythian cemetery at Aymyrlyg. **sus**

H. 20 cm  
Sixth to third century BC  
Aymyrlyg, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by A. M. Mandelshtam)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 2938/4





**Bone spoon with decorated handle**

The carving on this spoon is typical of 'Animal Style' art as it condenses representations of wildlife into a small area: a predator with its head reversed crouches next to the bowl, while three birds are shown at the opposite end, two simply represented by their heads and long curving beaks. An almost identical spoon found with a burial at Zhalgyz-oba in the same region of Kazakhstan was probably carved by the same individual.<sup>88</sup> **sus**

Bone  
L. 17.5; W. 2 (handle), W. 3.5 cm (bowl)  
Sixth to fifth century BC  
Nagornensk burial, Aktobe region, north-west Kazakhstan  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, TK2-1166 MA AAO-74/53



**Decorated leather bag containing lumps of cheese**

Cheese production has a long history – speciality cheeses are not a modern gourmet phenomenon – and seventeenth-century BC Mesopotamian texts refer to as many as twenty types.<sup>89</sup> This bag was found with the horse burials on the north side of burial mound 2 at Pazyryk and presumably had been attached to one of the saddles. It contained very well-preserved lumps of cheese. The early analyses could not determine the source of the milk from which it had been made, and the excavator observed that cow, yak, sheep and goat milk could have been used and indeed mixed, as it still was by local pastoralists in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>90</sup> **sus**

Leather, fur, cheese  
Bag: H. 32.5 cm; cheese: H. 3.5, W. 5 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684/340, 1684D/1





110  
**Sacral vertebra of sheep**  
Bone  
L. 9.4 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1684D/4  
Joints of meat were standard food offerings in  
Scythian tombs and usually consisted of the sacra  
or scapulae of sheep, sometimes placed inside a  
dish. This portion comes from the base of the spine  
and its size suggests it belonged to a variety of  
fat-tailed sheep. **SUS**

## Food residues

The frozen burial conditions in the Altai mountains that allow such exceptional survival of organic materials, such as wood, textiles and fur, also favour the preservation of molecular organic remains. These remains are an important source of evidence for the identification of substances that lack cellular structure, such as natural resins or food residues.<sup>91</sup> Analytical techniques such as GC-MS (gas chromatography–mass spectrometry), GC-C-IRMS (gas chromatography–combustion–isotope ratio mass spectrometry) and MALDI-TOF MS (matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time-of-flight mass spectrometry) are used to study the molecular and isotopic composition of organic residues linking them to the animals or plants from which they originate,<sup>92</sup> distinguishing types of fat (dairy/meat)<sup>93</sup> and identifying chemical markers of processing, for example cooking.<sup>94</sup> Food residues are typically associated with containers.<sup>95</sup> Research has shown that the absorbent properties of pottery allow fat and protein components of foods to be soaked up and preserved within the ceramic microstructure.<sup>96</sup> These invisible residues can be retrieved for analysis by destructive sampling of pottery sherds. Visible residues may also be present on the surface of cooking vessels as charred crusts, and these deposits encapsulate and protect residues in a similar way; they can also preserve additional chemical evidence for carbohydrate food components and micro-organic structures such as phytoliths (tiny mineral particles found within plants) and starch grains.

Integrating these different kinds of food-residue evidence is crucial because archaeological lipid (fat) residues tend to survive better than other compound classes, and so can create a misleading bias towards detection of fatty foods.<sup>97</sup> Preservation of food products is rare and restricted to the best preserving of the burial environments, as demonstrated by the survival of cheese lumps from Pazyryk (cat. 109). Combined with the excellent preservation of plant and animal tissues, such evidence affords an exceptional opportunity for integrated study of food resources and subsistence/culinary practices. Preservation of human remains offers potential for further broader evidence for diet, gained, for example, from isotopic analysis of hair<sup>98</sup> or protein analysis of dental calculus.<sup>99</sup> Pottery vessels are typically the main container types that survive archaeologically, but the excellent survival of wood and leather in the burial mounds offers scope to examine container use more broadly, and to correlate the residual evidence with material aspects of container forms and their functions in nomadic life. **RS**



111  
**Cauldron with four handles**

This cauldron represents a rare type of nomadic bronze vessel known exclusively from the steppe borderland of the Tian Shan.<sup>100</sup> Two of the handles are in the shape of rams, and the three hooved legs are decorated with the foreparts of rams. Other cauldrons have been discovered accidentally, sometimes as part of larger metal hoards containing 'Scythian' cauldrons on conical bases, sacrificial tables and incense burners, but none have yet been found in archaeological excavations. Although their chronology is therefore unclear, none is earlier than the mid-first millennium BC, and a relatively late date is also suggested by the fact that some tripod cauldrons are made of cast iron, which only replaced bronze at this date.<sup>101</sup> Their distinctive shape may have originated in ancient China, where ritual *ding* tripods are known as early as the Shang period (1600–1046 BC), but pottery tripod vessels of Bronze Age northern Iran are another possible prototype.<sup>102</sup> The fact that cauldrons form part of hoards and high-status burials shows that they were considered to be significant. The cauldron-like shape of certain belt-pendants may be related to the story of Heracles' belt 'that had a golden vessel on the end of its clasp';<sup>103</sup> it is because of this myth, Herodotus explains, 'that the Scythians carry vessels on their belts to this day'.<sup>104</sup> The ram images on the present cauldron also point to ritual use, since for many ancient Iranian peoples a ram symbolized 'divine fortune' (*xvarnah*). **KVC**

Bronze  
H. 62, diam. of the top 47.5 cm  
Fifth to second century BC  
Semirech'e, south-east Kazakhstan (chance find)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1654/1



112  
**Cauldron with loop handles and Greek decoration**

This cauldron with three ornamental registers was found in 1897 in the Raskopana Mogila burial mound on the right bank of the Dnieper. It combines the usual features of such vessels of the fifth to fourth centuries BC with unique decoration. The oval body of this cauldron is decorated with ornamental Greek elements of bulls' heads (*bucrania*) in conjunction with large circles enclosing smaller circles, probably solar signs, as well as palmettes and zigzags, the only pattern commonly found on other Scythian cauldrons. This design embodies the idea of the vertical composition of the Scythian world model: the top band was associated with the heavenly plane of the cosmos, the centre with the earthly plane, with flora representing the 'Tree of Life', and the bottom with the underworld. Bronze cauldrons were cast by the Scythians in clay moulds; the bell-shaped bases were made separately, and usually the handles have an arched shape, although some were made in the 'Animal Style'. In nomadic daily life such objects, even if used for mundane tasks like preparing food, also had ritual significance. The family or tribe would gather around the cauldron and during religious rites would cook the meat of sacrificial animals. Herodotus reports a Scythian tale of an enormous cauldron that 'easily contains five thousand and four hundred gallons', and which was made by melting 'a vast number of arrowheads' presented by Scythian subjects of king Ariantas.<sup>105</sup>

**AYuA**

Cast bronze  
H. 47, diam. 39 cm  
375–325 BC  
Raskopana Mogila burial mound near Mikhailovo-Apostolovo village, Dnieper river region, northern Black Sea (excavations by D. Evarnitsky, 1897)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,  
Dn 1897 2/14



Gold dress plaques: two Scythians sharing a drinking horn

These tiny plaques with images of two Scythians represent one of a variety of types found during the excavations of a side chamber at the Solokha burial mound. Over 130 such plaques of different sizes were found arranged along the legs of the Scythian 'king' in this grave, and as each has four holes in the corners they must have been sewn on in the form of a stripe along each trouser leg. Each has a punched representation of two kneeling, clean-shaven Scythians pressed to one another and sharing a drinking horn. This theme is known from similar objects from other 'royal' Scythian burial mounds. It is usually considered to be a contemporary illustration of the story recounted by Herodotus that, when it came to the swearing of pledges, the Scythian custom was to

take blood from the parties to the agreement by making a little hole or cut in the body with an awl or knife, and pour it mixed with wine into a great earthenware bowl, wherein they then dip a scimitar and arrows and an axe and a javelin; and when this is done the makers of the sworn agreement themselves, and the most honourable of their followers, drink of the blood after solemn imprecations.<sup>106</sup>

Many of the details seem inconsistent, but there are later reports by the second-century AD author Lucian of Samosata, in his work entitled *Tokharis*, of Scythian twinning and of deities and heroes being patrons of friendship. Forming a union that was closer than a familial one is a custom that existed in many cultures at a time when blood ties were weak and were replaced with a new type of social ties.<sup>107</sup> **AYuA**

Gold  
H. 2.5, W. 2.5 cm  
400–380 BC  
Solokha, Dnieper river region, northern Black Sea (excavations by N. I. Veselovsky, 1913)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg 1913 1/42



Drinking like the Greeks

Following the establishment of the first Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea coast in the late seventh century BC, trade and exchange developed between the Greek settlers and local populations of the forest steppes and steppes beyond the coastal region.<sup>108</sup> From the mid-sixth century BC, Greek wares increasingly found their way inland along large rivers such as the Dnieper, Bug and Don. Scythian elite burials now started to contain wine amphorae imported from Chios and other regions of the Greek world, Greek pottery and metal implements for storing, mixing, pouring and drinking wine (including fine silver cups, elaborate bronze strainers and ladles) and oil or perfume containers, besides metalwork made specifically for Scythian consumers.<sup>109</sup> It appears that with time such imports became available to wider sections of the population.<sup>110</sup> They indicate the social status of imported goods

including those related to banqueting.<sup>111</sup> Originally known among Greeks as 'milk drinkers',<sup>112</sup> Scythians probably adopted wine consumption from Greeks and soon acquired a reputation for excessive drinking of undiluted wine, which contrasted with the Greeks' habit of mixing their wine with water.<sup>113</sup> The finds shown here come from burial grounds on the right bank of the middle Dnieper south of Kiev; though of distinctive construction and overall less rich, the tombs share a similar material culture and burial rites with Scythian steppe burials.<sup>114</sup> Greek imports were distributed as far north as the Aksyutintsy burial mound and other burials of the Sula group.<sup>115</sup> **av**

Imported Athenian black-glazed pottery drinking cup (kylix)

Pottery  
H. 8.2, diam. 12 cm  
First half of the fifth century BC  
Burial mound 401 near the village of Zhurovka by the Dnieper, northern Black Sea (excavations by A. A. Bobrinsky, 1903)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1903 4/75



115

**Imported Greek transport  
amphora from Chios**

Pottery

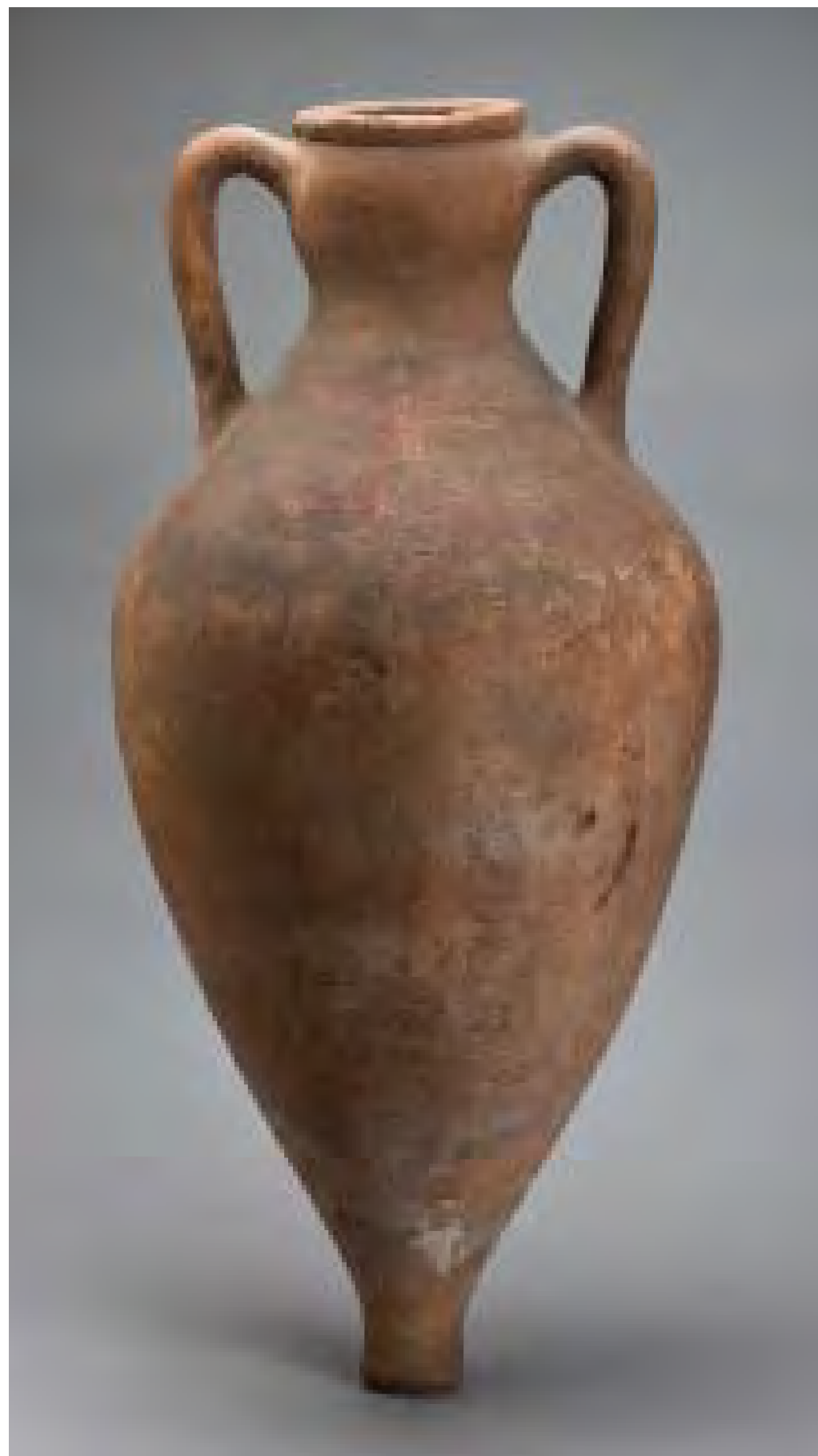
H. 64, diam. 28,5 cm

First half of the fifth century BC

Burial mound 401 near the village of Zhurovka  
by the Dnieper, northern Black Sea (excavations  
by A. A. Bobrinsky, 1903)

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,

Dn 1903 4/76



116

**Dipper**

Bronze

L. 49,5 cm

First half of the fifth century BC

Burial mound 401 near the village of Zhurovka  
by the Dnieper, northern Black Sea (excavations  
by A. A. Bobrinsky, 1903)

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,

Dn 1903 4/77

## 6 Mounted warriors





# Mounted warriors

K. V. Chugunov, T. V. Rjabkova & St J. Simpson

None who attacks them can escape, and none can catch them if they desire not to be found. For when men have no established cities or fortresses, but all are house-bearers and mounted archers, living not by tilling the soil but by cattle-rearing and carrying their dwellings on wagons, how should these not be invincible and unapproachable? This invention they have made in a land which suits their purpose and has rivers which are their allies; for the country is level and grassy and well watered.<sup>1</sup>

The Scythians had a fierce reputation and were always ready for war. This is illustrated in Greco-Scythian art, notably the gold comb from Solokha (fig. 121), and commented on by some of their contemporaries. Herodotus writes:

As to war, these are their customs. A Scythian drinks of the blood of the first man whom he has overthrown. He carries to his king the heads of all whom he has slain in the battle; for he receives a share of the booty taken if he brings a head, but not otherwise ... Moreover once in every year each governor of a province brews a bowl of wine in his own province, whereof those Scythians drink who have slain enemies; those who have not achieved this taste not this wine but sit apart dishonoured; and this they count a very great disgrace; but as many as have slain not one but many enemies, they have each two cups and so drink of them both.<sup>2</sup>

Herodotus also repeatedly mentions military clashes: the displacement and persecution of Cimmerians by the Scythians, the invasion of Media by ‘a great army of Scythians’,<sup>3</sup> and a military campaign against Egypt where the Egyptian king Psamtik I (664–610 BC) managed to appease them through gifts and requests.<sup>4</sup>

Waging extensive and successful offensive actions within the territories of the militarily powerful states of Assyria, Media and Urartu must have required advanced tactics, mobility and professional units, as well as a highly evolved combination of military equipment, and these well-organized Scythian forces rapidly spread through the Kuban region, the Caucasus and Anatolia.

The strong military character of this nomadic society is reflected in the special role played by weapons in their culture. They were not only functional but could also be symbolic in the performance of particular ceremonies, as they were believed to be endowed with special properties. The main weapon was the bow and arrow, which appears in a Scythian genealogical legend relating to Heracles and recounted by Herodotus: ‘whichever of them you see bending this bow thus and girding himself in this fashion with this girdle, make him a dweller in this land’.<sup>5</sup> In his description of the Massagetae, a related nomadic group in Central Asia, Herodotus also remarks:

These Massagetae are like the Scythians in their dress and manner of life. They are both horsemen and footmen (having some of each kind), and spearmen and bowmen; and it is their custom to carry battle-axes. They ever use gold and bronze; all their spear-points and arrow-heads and battle-axes are of bronze.<sup>6</sup>

A passage by the third-century BC Greek historian Phylarchus tells how Scythians, before going to bed, took a quiver, and if the day had been successful dropped a white stone inside, but if unsuccessful, a black one.<sup>7</sup> At the death of an individual, that person’s quiver was inspected and the stones counted: if there were more white stones than the deceased was glorified as a fortunate being.<sup>8</sup>

Fig. 121  
A scene of Scythians in combat shown on the handle of a gold comb from Solokha. H. 12.6 cm. Fifth to early fourth century BC. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1913 1/11



Although the information provided by written sources is usually associated with the culture of the Black Sea Scythians, it finds a close match with archaeological evidence from the eastern regions of Eurasia. It is here that the ritual of quiver hanging and even the deliberate piling of pebbles near the burial chamber are both attested.<sup>9</sup> Unlike in the western regions of the Scythian world, finds of bows and associated bow case and quiver (called *gorytos* in Greek) are well represented in the east, where excavations of burial mounds at Pazyryk in the high valleys of the Altai have yielded completely preserved bows as well as parts of the *gorytos*.<sup>10</sup> Bows and associated equipment have also been found in the ‘royal’ burial and memorial complexes at Arzhan-2 and Chinge-Tei I in Tuva.<sup>11</sup>

It is significant that the appearance of the Scythians in the northern Black Sea region is described by Herodotus as a military expansion from the depths of the Asian continent:

The nomad Scythians inhabiting Asia, being hard pressed in war by the Massagetae, fled away across the river Araxes to the Cimmerian country (for the country which the Scythians now inhabit is said to have belonged of old to the Cimmerians).<sup>12</sup>

This account is confirmed by the archaeological evidence, which shows eastern Eurasia to be the origin of this nomadic culture, and its tribes reached the

fertile plains of the northern Black Sea coast and the north-facing foothills of the north-west Caucasus between the tenth and eighth centuries BC.<sup>13</sup>

The Scythians, like the Sarmatians, Huns, Turks and Mongols who succeeded them in later centuries, proved a dangerous enemy. This was not just due to their use of the bow, but also reflects their highly effective use of mobile mounted warfare. Herodotus describes an unsuccessful attempt by Darius I to bring the Scythians to battle in an otherwise unattested Achaemenid campaign in the northern Black Sea region in about 513 BC. It failed because the Scythians made effective use of their local knowledge, destroyed wells and pasture, and withdrew deeper into their own territory, until Darius finally abandoned his expedition. This strategy was repeated successfully against the later Achaemenid ruler Cyrus II by the Massagetae, whom Herodotus said were like the Scythians;<sup>14</sup> Cyrus was lured into the Central Asian steppe somewhere near the Aral Sea and said to have been killed in battle. The essence of their success was the ability of pastoral nomads to retire rapidly into the steppe, where landmarks change and strangers are easily disorientated. A late sixth-century Byzantine military manual cautioned much later that:

the Scythian nations are one, so to speak, in their mode of life and their organization ... They prefer battles fought at long range, ambushes, encircling their adversaries, simulated retreats and sudden



Fig. 122  
The Scythian *gorytos* as it was discovered in the grave at Arzhan-2, with the arrows still *in situ*.

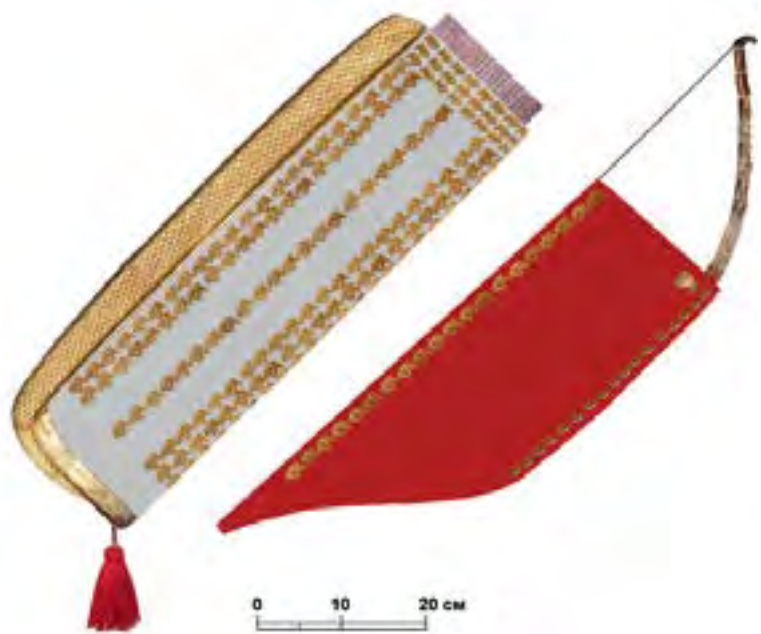


Fig. 123  
Reconstruction of *gorytos* based on the excavated finds from Arzhan-2.

returns, and wedge-shaped formations, that is, in scattered groups. When they make their enemies take to flight, they put everything else aside, and are not content, as the Persians, Romans, and other peoples, with pursuing them a reasonable distance and plundering their goods, but they do not let up at all until they have achieved the complete destruction of their enemies, and they employ every means to this end.<sup>15</sup>

Cavalry was the main combat unit of the Scythian army, but infantry was also used. This is clear from Herodotus' reference to how 'after the sending of the gifts to Darius, the Scythians who had remained there came out with foot and horse and offered battle to the Persians'.<sup>16</sup> It is also illustrated by archaeological finds and the evidence of trauma on excavated human remains, which demonstrate the use of hand-held short-range weapons as well as the bow and arrow, the main weapon of the Scythian rider.<sup>17</sup> The latter were stored in a wood and leather container (*gorytos*) slung from the belt and sometimes decorated with large metal plaques representing animals: a striking example of one of these was found in the burial mound of Kostromskaya in the Kuban region of the north-west Caucasus (cat. 120).<sup>18</sup> The appearance of this type of *gorytos* now can be reconstructed following a recent discovery at Arzhan-2 in Tuva (figs 122–23).<sup>19</sup> It consisted of two parts, one for the bow and the other for arrows. A large number of miniature gold plaques in the shape of wild boars (cats 121–22) were

found *in situ*. As these were originally sewn onto the *gorytos*, their relative position allows the reconstruction of this important piece of warrior-archer equipment. The wooden back of the quiver was still preserved beneath a gold overlay, decorated with an embossed scale pattern (cat. 123). This design is very similar to the decoration of nomads' quivers shown on Greek pottery (cat. 211).<sup>20</sup>

The shape of the later Scythian decorative *gorytos* of the fifth and fourth centuries BC has a long convex profile with no structural purpose.<sup>21</sup> It may instead be a legacy of much earlier Asian prototypes when, as at Arzhan-2, the bottom of the *gorytos* was supported by a projection. It is also possible to question the one-part Scythian *gorytos* reconstructed mainly on the basis of representations. There is no convincing evidence for its existence, although there are cases where an image of a bow does not appear on the *gorytos*, and other examples where the bow case was closed with a flap, and the pocket for the arrows is not obvious: for example, an amphora from Chertomlyk shows a Scythian wearing a *gorytos* but only the curling tip of the bow is visible (figs 124, 130),<sup>22</sup> and the decorative cover of a *gorytos* found in the burial mound at Melitopol does not confirm the presence of a bow.<sup>23</sup> The tradition of two separate compartments is shown on belts found in the cemetery at Tliyski in the northern Caucasus (fig. 125).<sup>24</sup> A double-compartmented *gorytos* may have evolved because it was easier to use in battle, as it could easily be swivelled on the belt so that the quiver faced forwards and the arrows were easier to



Fig. 124  
Detail from a gilt silver amphora from Chertomlyk showing a Scythian wearing a *gorytos* on his thigh. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

Fig. 125  
Belts of Tliyski cemetery (northern Caucasus): line drawing showing warriors with *gorytoi* as separate quivers and bow cases.

extract. This position is often shown on metalwares and Greek vases, and as the Arzhan-2 *gorytos* was decorated on both sides it must have been designed to be viewed from either side.<sup>25</sup> When not in use but still mounted on the belt, the *gorytos* was closed with a special cap similar to that recorded in the Pazyryk burial mounds,<sup>26</sup> and again shown on some Greco-Scythian representations.

Socketed arrowheads with two- or three-bladed sections (known as bilobate and trilobate arrowheads respectively) were widely used by Scythian archers in their western and eastern territories (cats 130–32). Both types originated in Central Asia, and their distribution around the Black Sea, Caucasus and Anatolia follows prototypes developed in the Eurasian steppe zone during the second millennium BC (late Bronze Age). Sets of identical two-bladed socketed arrows are found in the earliest nomad tombs from Asia to Europe and may indicate a migration from the east as early as the beginning of the first millennium BC. The size and shape of these early Scythian arrowheads indicate the type of battle conditions in which they were used. Massive arrowheads illustrate the increased role of cavalry in military actions: shooting from a moving horse adds initial velocity and increases penetration, and heavy slow-flying arrows are effective when shot as a 'cloud' at large groups of unarmoured individuals. These arrows could inflict serious wounds and were difficult to extract. Scythian arrows were so effective that, during the Scythian campaigns in Anatolia, the local population started to produce and use socketed



arrowheads of the Scythian type instead of local, tanged arrowheads.<sup>27</sup> Early Scythian Asian quiver sets were varied and also included arrows with the tang ending in a flattened wedge shape, which is connected with a tradition beginning in Zhou China, where these were the commonest type (cat. 132).<sup>28</sup>

*Akinakes* (short swords) measuring over 60 cm in length (cat. 138), daggers and battle-axes (cat. 135) were used in close combat. Such weapons were also status symbols, and are depicted on early Scythian anthropomorphic stone sculptures (fig. 126).<sup>29</sup> Ceremonial versions of these weapons were worn in ornate golden sheaths (cat. 139), and a ceremonial axe was excavated by D. G. Schultz in burial mound 1 at Kelermes (fig. 127). Finally, heavy spears with massive iron heads were especially effective in mounted warfare and a regular element of nomad weapons from early Scythian times (cat. 147).

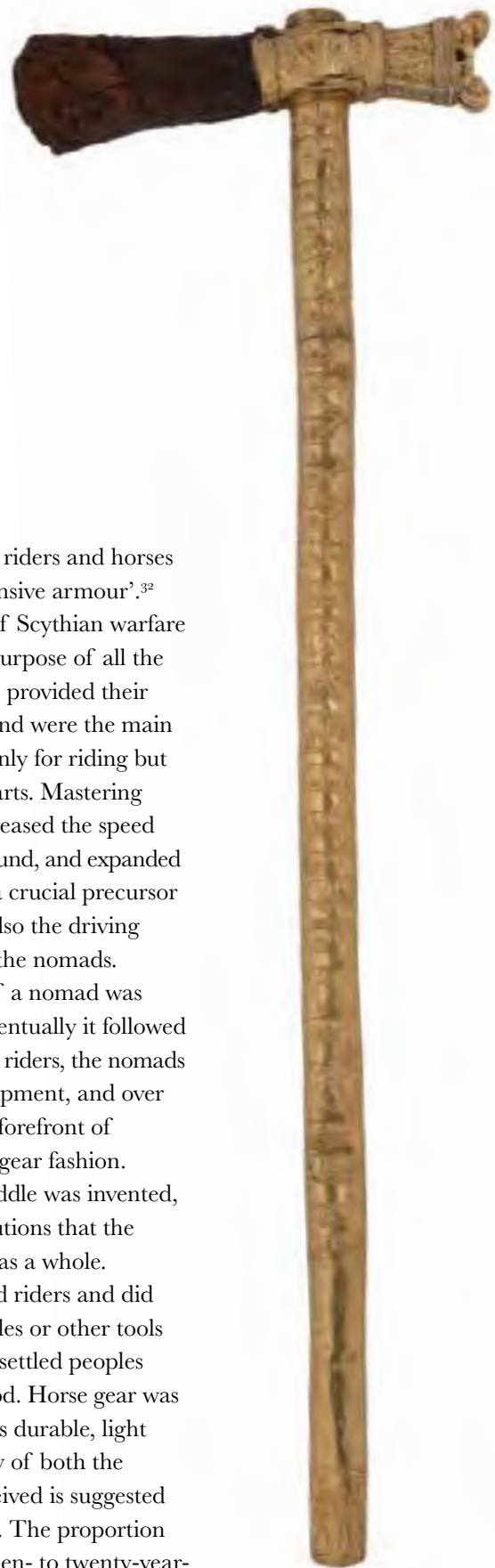
Not all nomads used spears or axes, and the preferred close-combat strike weapon in the eastern steppe was the *sagaris* axe (pointed battle-axe). The gold decoration on one of these, found in the main burial mound of Arzhan-2 in Tuva, perhaps indicates the use of these weapons in ceremonies (cat. 134). Rock art representations show warriors using an axe of this type (figs 128–29), and fatal puncture marks on the crania of men and horses alike show how effective they were (cat. 31). Daggers found with burials in southern Siberia and Central Asia are similar in form to the Scythian weapons. Special examples, often decorated with figures or the foreparts of animals, are





Fig. 126  
Side- and front-view drawings of a stone statue showing a man with a battle-axe and a short sword hanging from his belt.

Fig. 127  
Kelermes battle-axe. H. 72 cm.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, Ku 1903-2/3



found on the territory of the Tagar culture (cats 142–44). On the so-called ‘deer stones’ – anthropomorphic stelae accompanying nomadic burial and ritual complexes in the Asian steppes – the belt usually carries all the basic ingredients of the warrior-nomad’s arsenal: a dagger, a *sagaris* and a bow in a *gorytos* (cat. 28).

High-quality bronze helmets of Kuban type are another important piece of military equipment. They had thick walls and a reinforced crest on top, and the warrior’s face and neck were protected by leather or felt cheek or neck guards, possibly with a coating of metal scales attached to the helmet by means of holes punched along its lower edge (cat. 148).<sup>39</sup> The discovery of helmets in elite tombs at Kelermes and their representation on early Scythian statues (fig. 130) indicate that helmets were the most important part of defensive armour and a sign of the warrior’s high social status. Scale body armour provided protection for mounted warriors against both arrows fired from a distance and swords used in close combat (cat. 149); this type of armour was common in the nomadic world and spread to Anatolia after the Scythian campaigns. Herodotus refers to the Persians wearing ‘colourful coats with sleeves made of iron scales, like fish scales’, noting that the weapons are actually Median rather than Persian.<sup>31</sup> Scale armour appears to have become part of the Median military equipment as a result of borrowing from Scythian nomads who, Arrian noted, withstood Alexander’s forces at the battle of Gaugamela better

than others ‘because the Scythians, riders and horses alike, were better protected by defensive armour’.<sup>32</sup>

The horse was an essential part of Scythian warfare and the most important and multipurpose of all the animals used by nomads. They also provided their owners with milk, meat and hide, and were the main mode of transportation, used not only for riding but also for moving goods in sacks or carts. Mastering horseback riding exponentially increased the speed with which someone could move around, and expanded their horizons. A riding horse was a crucial precursor of nomadic herding. Cavalry was also the driving force behind the military might of the nomads. Whether man or woman, the life of a nomad was so closely tied to their horse that eventually it followed them into the afterlife. Natural born riders, the nomads were regularly improving their equipment, and over the course of centuries were at the forefront of equestrian development and horse-gear fashion. It was in Scythian times that the saddle was invented, one of the most significant contributions that the nomads made to world civilization as a whole.

The Scythians were accomplished riders and did not use the spiked bits, crops, muzzles or other tools of control commonly employed by settled peoples from antiquity to the medieval period. Horse gear was simplified as far as possible, and was durable, light and comfortable to use. The quality of both the equipment and the care horses received is suggested by the longevity of Scythian horses. The proportion of horse skeletons belonging to fifteen- to twenty-year-



Fig. 128  
Rock art representation from  
Tamgaly, Kazakhstan, showing  
a warrior dispatching an animal  
with a pointed battle-axe.

Fig. 129  
Rock art representation from  
Kuldjabasy, Kazakhstan, showing  
*Sakā* warriors with pointed  
battle-axes.



old horses, or older, is 30–60%, depending on the site. Their bones show signs of trauma and healed wounds. However, the appearance of the hooves shows that ‘private saddle’ horses never went hungry. They were cared for and well fed, unlike the herd horses, which had to rely on pasture throughout the year.<sup>33</sup> The gear on riding horses was often more ornate than that of their owners.

Normal horses were small, compact shaggy ponies with large heads; today, these can withstand temperatures as low as –50 degrees Celsius and find their own food under snow or ice simply by stamping hard on the ground. The emaciated appearance and famine rings on the hooves of many Pazyryk horses testify to this, as these are typical of horses who are forced to fend for themselves in winter.<sup>34</sup> Herodotus remarks that ‘horses stand the winter well, but mules and donkeys cannot stand it at all’.<sup>35</sup> The excavators of Pazyryk and Berel found the remains of slaughtered horses piled high on the northern side of each of the tomb chambers: they were accompanied by halters, bridles and saddles, and occasionally whips, pouches and shields were attached to the right sides of the saddles, proving that they were for riding. All of the horse equipment showed signs of wear and occasional repair, implying that it had been worn during life.

The leading horses to be interred in Pazyryk-1 and Berel-11 were equipped with elaborate costumes, including headgear with griffins or antlers, saddle covers decorated with ‘Animal Style’ combat scenes, and long dangling pendants representing fish or

defeated animals, which have been interpreted as symbolizing a vertical hierarchy of iconography symbolizing the upper, normal and underworlds.<sup>36</sup> At Pazyryk-1 these main horses also proved to be the oldest – one was aged eighteen, the other twenty – implying that they were the most trusted. Their hooves do not exhibit the famine rings observed on other horses, meaning they had been given supplementary feed in winter. These other horses were buried with their saddles on, but the bridles had just been thrown on top, so it is not always clear to which horses they belonged. In most cases the tails were carefully plaited, and two of the horses in Pazyryk-1 had special tail-covers made from leather (cat. 170). All the horses with headgear also wore leather or leather-covered felt mane covers, and the ears bore individual marks.<sup>37</sup>

With the exception of the lead horses, analysis of the bones revealed most to be young castrated stallions (geldings) of two to three and a half years and relatively tall, with a withers height of between 112 and 168 cm. The castration of the males would have made them more tractable, and minimized fighting and competition over females. There was a clear preference for certain colours: most were chestnut and brown horses, bays were less common, black horses were rare, and there were no dappled greys, mottled bays, skewbalds, roans or greys. The source of the horses is uncertain but thought to be the Ursul or Karakul valleys of the central Altai, where conditions for breeding are more favourable than the immediate



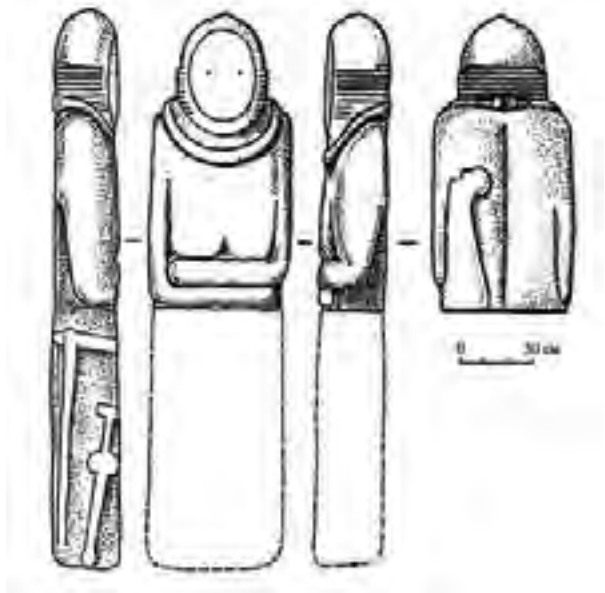


Fig. 130  
Side-, front- and back-view drawings of a stone statue from Stavropol museum showing a male warrior wearing a helmet with a pointed battle-axe and lobed dagger at his right side and a bow-case behind.

environs of Pazyryk.<sup>38</sup> At Arzhan-2 fourteen horses were buried in grave 16; they were also geldings with a withers height of 140 cm, but aged between eight and twenty years and showing signs of heavy riding. Molecular-genetic analysis of the bones indicated that fourteen of them belonged to ten different haplotypes so probably came from different herds; perhaps they were gifts from other tribes.<sup>39</sup> Unusually, the analysis of the remains interred next to a small burial mound in Kizil showed they belonged to an eleven-year-old mare with a withers height of about 132 cm, but suffering from joint disease of the left hind leg, which must have made her dispensable.<sup>40</sup>

Almost all horses were dispatched in the same manner, with a hard blow of a pointed battle-axe to the mid-forehead; this is the same spot where a modern owner is instructed to shoot a horse if necessary. However, not all were killed with one action: some have multiple impact wounds in the same area, which suggests resistance during chaotic scenes as the screaming horses scented blood and fear.<sup>41</sup> Within a society that prized horses, it is reasonable to suggest that owners and animals knew each other very well, and the killing of so many horses in a short space of time must have made a deep impression on everyone present.

Nomadism was impossible without the horse, and thus nomadic cultures are always characterized by a special attitude to their horses. This is archaeologically illustrated by the discovery of numerous articles of harness and the use of horses in burial rituals. Judging by the many finds of girth clasps, soft saddles were invented within the Scythian nomadic environment

during the seventh century BC, which significantly increased the combat capabilities of cavalry (cat. 162). Their design proved to be very successful, and by the end of the fifth century BC, saddles of Scythian type were adopted by all sedentary civilizations in contact with nomads, from China to Greece.

During the early Scythian period, bridle kits included a bronze snaffle bit with stirrup-shaped loops, which were gradually replaced by iron. The snaffle bits were connected to the headbands with triple-looped and three-hole cheekpieces (*psalia*) made of iron, bronze and bone. Of particular interest are cheekpieces with tips in the form of a mythical horned eagle's head at one end and hooves at the other; three-hole bone cheekpieces with zoomorphic decorated ends were replaced during the fifth and fourth centuries BC by a two-hole version. Bridles decorated with mythical images were perhaps intended to represent qualities such as fearlessness, speed and invulnerability, and were therefore well suited for warhorses. The tradition of decorating bridle accessories with images of animals is known from the earliest stages of Scythian culture and continued to develop throughout this period.

On the European steppes, bridle design developed quite suddenly and was accompanied by other changes in Scythian culture, whereas Asian nomads had bridles of various kinds, including some not found further west. This diversity suggests the search for the best bridle, as an important element of nomadic culture, took place in the east. At the beginning of the sixth century BC in Asia, a new design was developed that became widespread, consisting of a bridle with two-hole cheekpieces placed into the rings of the snaffle bit. Probably in the nomadic steppe world the exchange of new ideas on horse equipment and armament took place very rapidly and dynamically. In any case, these cultural changes occurred almost simultaneously across the vast nomadic territories. This offers a very convenient and sensitive tool for modern researchers interested in the chronological development of early Iron Age monuments of Eurasia, and archaeologists have therefore studied horse gear and arms in great detail.

Eurasia's steppe belt stretched from northern China in the east through large parts of southern Siberia and Central Asia and as far as the northern Black Sea region and Europe. Throughout the first millennium

BC this vast 'steppe corridor' was home to tribes who practised nomadic herding. The reason this practice has survived from antiquity is the fact that the nomadic way of life is the most advanced adaptation to the complex ecological and climatic conditions of the Eurasian steppe. The constant relocation demanded mobility that was only achievable through order. The asceticism of this way of life astounded contemporaries. Constant conflicts over pastures and campaigns to capture livestock informed notions of war and became a fixture of nomadic military culture. The most striking aspect of the nomadic material culture is undoubtedly its weaponry and horse gear, which underwent many stages of evolution to reach maximum efficiency (figs 131–33).

The direction of the nomadic campaigns always went west from Central Asia. The Scythian tribes were no exception. Studying nomadic migrations, L. S. Klein concluded that Inner (Central) Asia was a 'generator of peoples', constricted by unsuitable regions to the east and north, and by the might of the Chinese state to the south.<sup>42</sup> The only path open to migration was west. The steppe corridor, delimited to the north by forest and by the Black Sea and Caspian Sea to the south, was a vast and almost uninterrupted zone of almost unlimited pasture, which became ever more luscious as the climate became more temperate towards the west. That is why the nomadic groups moved west and fought with the

tribes and states already occupying those lands. Archaeological data show that the more mobile warriors not only enslaved their sedentary and often ethnically different neighbours and assimilated their cultural achievements, but also acted as conduits both for their own culture and for that of the peoples they conquered. Thus the Eurasian steppe belt of the last millennium BC served as an important region of transmission for innovations that penetrated the furthest corners of the Old World.

Fig. 131  
Reconstruction of three sets of horse equipment, referring to three stages of the Pazyryk culture. From burial mound 2, Bashadar; burial mound 1, Pazyryk; burial mound 3, Pazyryk.

Fig. 132  
Reconstruction of Scythian horseman based on the finds from Verkh-Khaldjin-2, burial mound 3.

Fig. 133  
Reconstruction of Scythian horseman based on the finds from Verkh-Khaldjin-2, burial mound 1.





# Conflict in Scythian society

Scythian life was punctuated by periodic violence and interpersonal conflict. This is discussed by ancient historians and confirmed archaeologically. Lucian of Samosata wrote: 'With us, however, wars are continuous, and we are always either invading the territory of others, or withdrawing before invaders, or meeting in battle over pasturage or stolen cattle.'<sup>43</sup> Thucydides commented: 'there is none which can make a stand against the Scythians if they all act in concert.'<sup>44</sup> And Herodotus quotes the Scythian king Idanthysus replying to Darius:

It is thus with me, Persian: I have never fled for fear of any man, nor do I now flee from you; this that I have done is no new thing or other than my practice in peace. But as to the reason why I do not straightway fight with you, this too I will tell you. For we Scythians have no towns or planted lands, that we might meet you the sooner in battle, fearing lest the one be taken or the other be wasted. But if nothing will serve you but fighting straightway, we have the graves of our fathers; come, find these and essay to destroy them; then shall you know whether we will fight you for those graves or not.<sup>45</sup>

The archaeological evidence for visible trauma on a high percentage of excavated human remains, the robbing of tombs, post-mortem desecration of bodies and dismantling of stelae prove that there was fierce competition over territory and resources; moreover, the large number of weapons placed in graves is proof of a militarized society. Scythian arrowheads have been found embedded in human remains excavated at a large number of cemeteries from the northern Black Sea region to Kazakhstan, with wounds to the crania, vertebrae, thorax, pelvis, arms, legs and ankles (figs 134–35); other injuries derive from pointed battle-axes driven through the cranium or nape of the neck, and spears thrust into the forehead or pelvis.<sup>46</sup> The detailed anthropological examination of a cemetery at Aymyrlyg in southern Siberia showed that of a Scythian population of 436, several suffered signs of trauma. Among them were twelve individuals apparently killed by pointed battle-axes, with most trauma on the face or front of the head: 75% of these were men, but three of the individuals were sub-adult or female.<sup>47</sup> In other cases, such as burial mound 11 at Alexandropol, the evidence reflects the execution of men and even children interred as companions for the leader lying in large burial mounds, showing that these were not always simply strangled, as Herodotus reports.<sup>48</sup> **SUS**



**ABOVE**  
Fig. 134  
Cranium of a man aged fifty to sixty found in burial 1 in burial mound 3, near the village of Mikhailovka, with a bronze arrowhead embedded in the right eye-socket.



**LEFT**  
Fig. 135  
Drawing of a rock art scene at Sagyr, eastern Kazakhstan, showing two men wearing bow cases and attacking each other with pointed battle-axes.

Plaque with a Scythian horseman

This relief resembles the famous gold comb from the Solokha burial mound (fig. 121) and the horsemen in the Parthenon frieze.<sup>49</sup> Despite its Greek style, it clearly depicts a Scythian warrior, characterized by his long hair, beard, moustache, belted jacket, broad trousers and soft moccasins. Oblique lines on the moccasins suggest they were made of leather straps. The jacket is covered with circles that may represent sewn-on decorative gold plaques, many actual examples of which are known from excavations.<sup>50</sup> Decorative pieces like this come in a variety of shapes and were attached to clothing, headgear, and perhaps other textile or leather items. They may have been part of ritual attire (in which case their imagery should be interpreted symbolically) or everyday dress. Some plaques have additional sewing holes made in them and must have been used over a longer period of time, rather than just

for funerals or ceremonies. The present one was originally rectangular and trimmed down at a later point, hence its uneven edges. **AVK**

Gold  
L. 5 cm  
Late fifth to early fourth century BC, Bosporan Kingdom  
Kul' Oba, northern Black Sea region  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, K-O.49



Plaque with a hare hunt

The horseman on this plaque wears typical Scythian dress. A hare crouches under his horse's hooves in what may be an ordinary hunting scene. However, the image could have special meaning. According to Herodotus, when Darius invaded their country:

the Scythians who had remained there came out with foot and horse and offered battle to the Persians. But when the Scythian ranks were arrayed, a hare ran out between the armies; and every Scythian that saw it gave chase. So there was confusion and shouting among the Scythians; Darius asked what the enemy meant by this clamour; and when he heard that they were chasing the hare, then said ... 'These fellows hold us in deep contempt.'<sup>51</sup>

Despite what Darius reportedly thought, it is unlikely that his adversaries went after the hare just for sport: according to popular beliefs of Iranian peoples, sacrificing a hare brings good fortune and victory in battle.<sup>52</sup> A hare is featured on the famous deer pendant from the older burial at Kul' Oba,<sup>53</sup> and a very finely carved piece of bone once part of a comb also depicts a hare hunt.<sup>54</sup> From the late fifth century onwards, hare images became very popular on decorative gold plaques, demonstrating the importance of this animal for the Scythians.<sup>55</sup> **AVK**

Gold  
H. 4.3, W. 5.2 cm  
Late fifth to early fourth century BC, Bosporan Kingdom  
Kul' Oba, northern Black Sea region  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, K-O.48





Gold plaque showing two Scythian archers

This tiny gold plaque was originally part of a much larger set of identical ornaments stitched onto a garment, hence the tiny holes around the edge. It represents a pair of Scythian archers, back to back, each raising a composite bow in combat. Despite the miniature scale, we can see details of how their hair was tied into a bun at the back. The archers are wearing short close-fitting sleeved jackets with trimming and decorated trousers tucked into short boots: the trimming of the jackets was probably fur, and the fact that the trousers are made of different vertical sections sewn together implies they are leather rather than cloth.<sup>56</sup> Scientific analysis shows the plaque to be made from unrefined electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver with small amounts of copper (c. 78.5% gold, 20% silver and 1.5% copper). The sheet was shaped using the repoussé technique, i.e. the gold sheet was hammered into relief from the back, possibly into

a pre-shaped mould. The decoration was achieved through chasing and punching, i.e. deforming the metal from the front by gently hammering a blunt-edged tool or a punch with a rounded end into the gold sheet to create the motifs. Repoussé was also used to enhance further the three-dimensionality of the designs.<sup>57</sup> After working, the front surface would have been polished, and scanning electron microscopy reveals these features in astonishing detail (opposite).

This plaque comes from a large burial mound at Kul' Oba, near Kerch, which was excavated by Paul Du Brux in 1830 and found to contain a large amount of gold grave goods, most of which are now in the collections of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg (see Chapter 8).<sup>58</sup> Among the most famous are a torc with terminals showing Scythians on horseback and a pair of gold bracelets with sphinx protomes.<sup>59</sup> A number of other smaller items were dispersed into other collections, especially duplicates and some of the tiny gold plaques that had been scattered across the tomb floor. Seven

of these were acquired by the British Museum in 1846 and 1909 and show different designs.<sup>60</sup> **SUS, AM**

Gold  
H. 3.1, W. 3.5 cm, wt 1.45 g  
Kul' Oba, northern Black Sea region  
British Museum, London, 1909,0617.2

Fig. 136  
Detail of the plaque showing the upper portion and bow of the right archer.

Fig. 137  
Detail of the plaque showing the trousers and boots of the right archer.





# ‘The Scythian bow’

Judging by depictions, Scythian bows were relatively short, between 75 and 100 cm in length.<sup>61</sup> They were made from layers of wood and sinew in what is known as a composite or compound bow, and these became synonymous with what was referred to as ‘the Scythian bow’ (*Scythicus arcus*). They were much more powerful than either a simple bow made from a single stave of wood or a sinew-backed wooden bow, as the different layers increased the tensile forces and energy when the string was released. Proficiency in archery is implicit: Aristotle and Theophrastus both refer to the training taken by Scythian archers; according to one source, a Greek attempt to cross the Tigris in 401 BC was thwarted by Persian archers shooting at it from the other side of the river; and Strabo states that Mithridates VI, king of Pontus (r. 120–63 BC), fired an arrow over 200 m.

Unlike other types of bow, they can be stored braced for relatively long periods in a distinctively shaped combined case for bow and arrows, known as a *gorytos*, which is easily recognizable on contemporary depictions on Achaemenid sculptures and seals, as the curved tips of the bows protrude from the end (fig. 138). Excavations of Scythian burials confirm that quivers were often grave goods, and although they often contained no more than 15–20 arrows, large burials belonging to more important individuals contained hundreds, sometimes in multiple quivers that could contain as many as 279 arrows in a single case.<sup>62</sup> Although this sounds like a large number, experiments show that a quiver of 30 arrows can be shot in 3 minutes, and a single archer could fire some 150 arrows in a 15-minute sustained arrow shower.<sup>63</sup>

Reeds were commonly used for the shafts, and according to a much later (early thirteenth century AD) source, ‘no arrow travels further and is lighter and works better than one of reed but it needs to be well matured and dried and driven through a mould and straightened’.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, reeds are very light, rigid yet sufficiently elastic to ‘bend round the bow during shooting, and flex so the tail swings clear of the bow before swinging back into line as the arrow travels along the line it was aimed at the moment of release’.<sup>65</sup> Several classical writers state that the Scythians dipped their arrows in poison, so it was enough just to wound the adversary, as the poison would take effect once it entered the bloodstream. Removing arrowheads from a body was often difficult, as they were attached to the shafts with thin sinew thread: as these lengthen when wet, the arrowheads became easily detached as the shaft was pulled out.<sup>66</sup> **sus**



Fig. 138  
Achaemenid representation of a *gorytos* being worn by a Persian, on the northern facade of the Apadana, Persepolis.

## Deer-shaped plaque

The Scytho-Siberian ‘Animal Style’ is named because animal imagery dominated the art of the Eurasian steppe tribes in the first millennium BC. This not only served as decoration but also carried a distinct mythological symbolism. Its message must have been clear to the ancient nomads but can now only be interpreted in part through surviving texts and comparative mythology. This large deer-shaped plaque is generally considered a masterpiece of the ‘Animal Style’. Prof. Veselovsky of the University of St Petersburg discovered it at ground level beneath the first burial mound he excavated at Kostromskaya: ‘Beside the spears, at the western edge, lay a thin, round iron shield, to which a splendid 33 cm long gold deer had been attached’, he reported.<sup>67</sup>

This plaque was therefore believed to have formed the central boss on a shield, but A. Yu. Alexeyev has demonstrated that it most probably decorated a *gorytos* (bow case).<sup>68</sup> Similar *gorytos* ornaments are depicted on Scythian stone

sculptures (fig. 130). The plaque is made of a thick piece of sheet gold, embossed and chased, with gold loops soldered to the back for attachment to an organic back. Two gold cells embedded in the ear and eye may be later additions, and were probably originally filled with coloured glass. The high quality of workmanship indicates a very skilled craftsman, and the style of the piece suggests he may have been active somewhere in Anatolia. There are no traces of Iranian, Assyrian or Urartian artistic influences, while the workmanship closely follows the principles of the Scythian ‘Animal Style’: the animal’s reclining position, the ornamental treatment of its antlers and the division of the body into large sections reminiscent of carved wood. **TVR**

Embossed and chased gold

L. 31.7 cm

Second half of the seventh century BC

Burial mound 1, Kostromskaya, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by N. I. Veselovsky, 1897)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2498/1





Bow case from Arzhan-2

The 'royal' burial at Arzhan-2 contained a richly decorated *gorytos* (fig. 139), a combination of a bow case and a quiver. A long edge of the quiver was reinforced with a wooden frame covered in gold leaf, and the bottom was reinforced with a separate gold element with a slit that allowed it to be attached to the wooden vertical frame. Both pieces have scale-like ornament carved in the wood and impressed into gold leaf; a similar pattern is sometimes illustrated on Greek vase painting showing nomad archers (cat. 211). The leather walls of the *gorytos* do not survive, but their shape can be reconstructed from the gold plaques that once covered them and which were meticulously recorded by the excavators. However, it is not obvious how the bow case was joined to the quiver, but the fact that the former was decorated on its front and the quiver on both sides shows that they were probably detachable. **kvc**



121

Plaques in the form of a boar figure turned right: bow case decoration

Gold  
H. 1.6, L. 2.4 cm (each)  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/1/31-50

122

Plaques in the form of a boar figure turned left: bow case decoration

Gold  
H. 1.2, L. 2.1 cm (each)  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/2/6-25

123

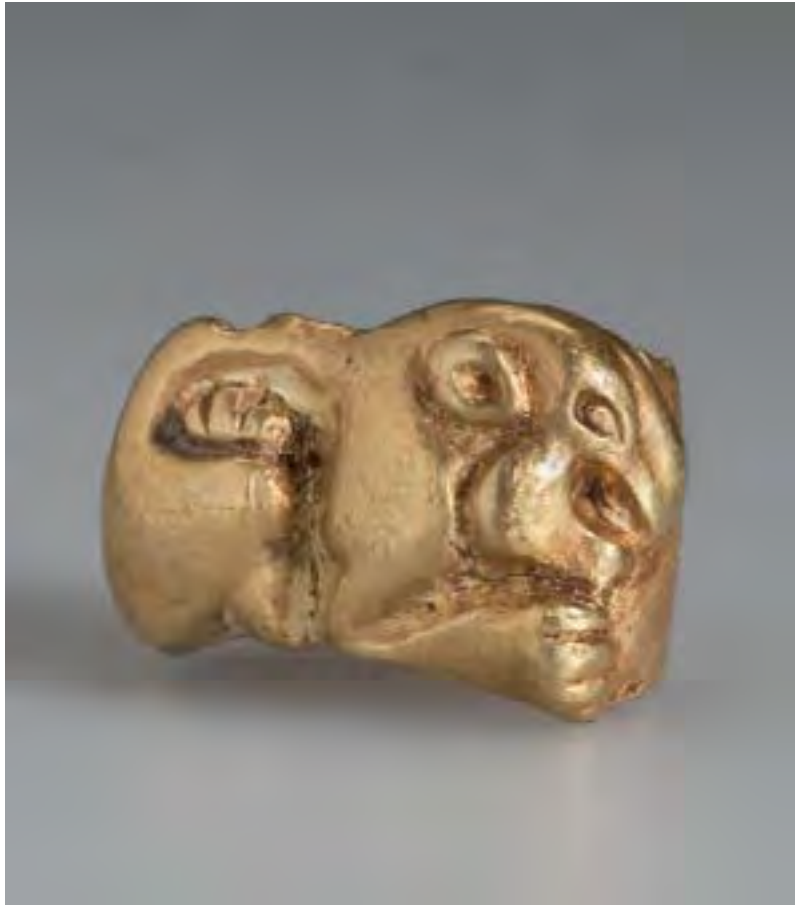
Wooden frame of a bow case with scale design

Wood  
L. 59 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/18

RIGHT

Fig. 139  
Quiver as discovered *in situ* on the floor of the main tomb chamber at Arzhan-2, Tuva. The arrows have been removed, showing the decoration more clearly. Lying to the right of it is a pointed battle-axe.





124–126

### Sword-belt holders

Sword-belt straps for the blades of the 'royal' couple at Arzhan-2 were decorated with small gold fittings with animal images. Four holders with feline predators were found beside the man's *akinakes*. This iconography may represent the development of the coiled predator image, the most archaic in the 'Animal Style' of the Scythian period. Three other holders have scenes of a predator mauling an antelope and were also found beside the *akinakes*. It appears that such narrative compositions began to be made around this period, as the mauling scene is shown rather schematically. The antelope's muzzle is positioned in the open maw of the beast. It is curious that a mistake was made in the making of one of the holders from this series. The craftsman mismatched the parts of the casting mould, and as a result an image of two monsters with intertwined bodies was produced.

On the strap of the dagger of the woman there are three holders with beautifully made figures of a reclining wild goat. **kvc**

124. Sword-belt holder showing an animal contest scene

Gold

H. 1.6, L. 1.2, W. 1.1 cm

Seventh century BC

Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/4

125. Sword-belt holder showing a feline predator

Gold

H. 1.4, L. 0.8, W. 0.8 cm

Seventh century BC

Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/5



126. Sword-belt holder showing a reclining goat

Gold

H. 1.5, L. 1.3, W. 1.1 cm

Seventh century BC

Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/7





127–128

### Openwork belt holders

A collection of gold belt holders and appliqués was found *in situ* under the remains of the bow case in the north-east part of the 'royal' grave at Arzhan-2 (fig. 139). These once decorated a full-dress warrior belt and sword belt, and are typical of the Central Asian region's wealthy nomad-archer. These belts were worn with the belt's end dangling down, with shaped holders adorning it. It is possible that the number of the holders was correlated to the warrior's status. **KVC**

Gold  
H. 4, W. 1.8 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/8/5-8, 2917/9/3



129

### Iron arrowhead with gold overlays representing a bird and an antelope's head

The gold decoration on this large arrowhead symbolizes a bird of prey attacking an antelope. The arrow may have served a special ritual function rather than being a simple functional weapon. Arzhan-2 contained a number of iron weapons: an *akinakes*, a dagger, knives, a pointed battle-axe (cat. 134) and gold-decorated arrowheads such as this. When first excavated, all of the iron had turned into shapeless lumps of metal oxide mixed with soil and decomposed wood, and the gold decoration was almost entirely covered by oxides. Conservators at the State Hermitage Museum carefully cleaned the gold and reattached it to its now mineralized base. Since the iron of the arrowheads is fully oxidized, their original shape can only be reconstructed on the basis of the gold ornament.

This iron arrowhead is decorated using gold appliqué. The gold plates were glued onto the iron, and then an openwork drawing was cut above the gold. A pointed battle-axe and other iron objects from this mound were decorated in the same way. They were previously reported to be encrusted but this is a mistake, and the real technique used is worth considering.<sup>69</sup> Encrusting involves cutting or chiselling grooves into the mould, inserting wire or plates, and then hammering. This method can be identified through traces of deformation on the edges and back of the inlays. However, appliqués show no such traces: on the glued plates both the upper and lower surfaces retain their initial texture whereas the edges still have the traces of cutting, and these are the features found on the Arzhan-2 iron objects with gold decoration. This type of decoration was used not only for Scythian-period objects but also from the Bronze Age to the medieval period.<sup>70</sup> **KVC, RM**

Iron, gold  
L. 4.1, W. 1.3 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/25

130–132

Arrowheads

Scythian arrowheads had two or three blades, and occasionally also a hooked spike at the base. They were effective against large groups of unarmoured infantrymen and were commonly used after about 700 BC. **TVR**

130. Cast bronze arrowheads

Bronze  
L. 4.2–4.4 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Burial mound 29, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by L. K. Galanina, 1983)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2739/77



131. Cast bronze arrowheads

Bronze  
L. 3.7–4.4 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Burial mound 24, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by L. K. Galanina, 1983)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2739/79



132. Arrowheads with fragmentary shafts

Bronze, wood, horn  
L. (without shafts) 1.8–6.5 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2002)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/88/1-8



133

Painted arrow shafts

Painted arrow shafts are found in both royal and ordinary Scythian burials. The paint may have been used not just for decoration, but also for practical purposes to brand the arrow (fig. 140). Out of the seven arrows in the quiver from the fifth burial mound at Ulandryk-I, the shafts of six were painted red and had bone arrowheads, and the bronze-tipped arrow had small black lines marked across the shaft.<sup>71</sup> In Scythian times arrows were stored with their heads pointing downwards within the quiver. It is no coincidence that the painted part of the arrow is the nock, which is visible in the quiver. **EVS**

Wood  
L. 5–15 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 3, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1685/31

Fig. 140  
Watercolour of painted arrow shafts from tomb 5 at Pazyryk.





Pointed battle-axe

This was excavated in grave 5 at Arzhan-2, where it had originally been suspended from the tomb chamber wall.<sup>72</sup> The handle was carved from a honeysuckle branch. Both the axe head and the metal butt attached to the end of the handle (shown opposite, right, as a detail) were ornamented with gilded spirals, and the tiny head of a bird of prey is shown just below the axe blade. As this decoration goes over the silver pin that originally held the terminal to the handle, it must have been added at the very final stage of manufacture. As the iron rusted, this corrosion filled some of the openwork and created the illusion that special grooves had been made for inlaying the base metal with gold. However, careful examination shows that the gold decoration was not actually inlaid,<sup>73</sup> but simply applied as an overlay onto the flat iron surface. This technique is generally typical of Scythian and Sarmatian metalwork, including large swords with hilts ornamented in copper, gold and silver.<sup>74</sup>

This type of pointed battle-axe was a common Scythian weapon used in hand-to-hand combat. Achaemenid seals show them being brandished by individuals wearing Central Asian or Scythian dress (cat. 211) or carried on Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis (fig. 138); a Greek red-figure oinochoe in the British Museum shows two ‘Persians’ in Central Asian dress carrying similar weapons.<sup>75</sup> An axe head of this type was found on the floor of the ‘Hundred Column Hall’ at Persepolis, and a few others have also been reportedly acquired in Iran or the Caucasus; they may have been the personal weapons of Scythians serving in these regions.<sup>76</sup> This example is unusually well preserved as the handle is intact and ends with a sharp pointed butt; the pick-like blade is oval in section and ends in a point. Its excavated context shows that this type of weapon was used as early as the seventh century BC, but the type continued at least as late as the fourth century BC. Their effectiveness is illustrated by the impact holes left by these weapons on the cranium of the man in tomb 2 at Pazyryk (cat. 31), and on crania belonging to people buried in cemeteries extending from southern Siberia to Ukraine (fig. 60).<sup>77</sup> Each of the horses interred

in the tomb shafts outside the main burial chamber at Pazyryk was also killed in the same manner, with a single blow to the forehead. **KVC, RM, SJS**

Iron, gold, wood  
L. 62 cm (handle); L. 18.8 cm (blade)  
Seventh century BC  
Grave 5, Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia  
(excavations by K. V. Chugunov, H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2917/19/1-3



**Battle-axe**

The long wooden handles of battle-axes such as this acted as levers to produce a mighty blow. These weapons were in widespread use and are represented on some pre-Scythian and Scythian stone statues (fig. 126). **TVR**

Forged iron  
L. 20, W. 3.8 cm (blade)  
Second half of the seventh century BC  
Grave 29, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavation by L. K. Galanina, 1983)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2736/104



**Socketed axe and one half of a two-part mould for casting socketed axes**

Tools like this axe were used for woodworking, for chopping or as adzes. The loops are in the shape of eagle heads. Both the axe and mould originally belonged to Innokentii Lopatin (1839–1909), a mining engineer and prominent collector of Minusinsk antiquities, who during the 1860s and 1870s assembled over 2,000 artefacts, mostly of bronze and iron, ranging in date from the late Bronze Age to the medieval period. **SVP**

Bronze  
L. 11 cm (axe); L. 10.6, W. 5.6 cm (mould)  
Seventh to fourth century BC  
Kardosany village, chance find, Krasnoyarsk region, southern Siberia (I. A. Lopatin collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 531/75 (axe); 5531/1226 (mould)





'*Akinakes*' is a word first attested in Herodotus' *History*, and was evidently the ancient Iranian name for a type of short sword commonly used in the early Scythian period. This short iron sword has a rounded hilt and a butterfly-shaped guard. Weapons of this type were used for close-range combat by both infantry and mounted warriors. First attested in the seventh century BC, they became common between about 550 and 400 BC. Their wide use was probably related to the spread of metal armour. Evidence of blade trauma probably caused by a sword was observed by Murphy on three Scythian individuals, all men, buried in the southern Siberian cemetery at Aymyrlыg: none showed signs of healing, and in one case the blow appeared to have come from behind, perhaps as an execution.<sup>78</sup> **TVR, SUS**

Forged iron  
L. 55 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound near the village of Brovarka, Dnieper area, northern Black Sea region (excavations by N. E. Brandenburg, 1902)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,  
Dn 1932-28/1



Only fragments of the iron blade have survived inside the gold scabbard of this high-status *akinakes*. The rounded hilt with butterfly-shaped guard is covered with gold leaf. Winged genii flanking a sacred tree are depicted on the guard and the neck of the scabbard. Further down are winged bulls and lions. The projection by which the scabbard was attached to the belt shows a reclining deer and birds' heads. The mixture of Near Eastern and Scythian motifs suggests that this was made for a Scythian patron by a Near Eastern craftsman familiar with the arts of Urartu and Luristan. **TVR**

Cast and forged iron; chased gold  
L. 15.5 cm (hilt); L. 47 cm (blade)  
Seventh century BC  
Burial mound 1, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by D. G. Schultz, 1903)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,  
Ku 1903 2/2

140  
**Decorated iron dagger**

This was found in the burial at Issyk of a very wealthy man, known as 'the golden man' because of the sheer quantity of gold ornaments originally sewn to his clothing. The zoomorphic pommel is in the form of a pair of addorsed griffins' heads facing each other, with gold wire wound around the grip and an ornamental plate running down the centre of the blade. The technique of gold overlay is the same as that described above for cat. 129.<sup>79</sup> **sus**

L. 48 cm  
Fifth to third century BC  
Burial mound, Issyk, south-east Kazakhstan  
(excavations by A. K. Akishev)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan,  
Astana, MTK1-1842



141  
**Iron dagger**

This is a splendid example of a full-size iron battle dagger from the Scythian period. Found by chance, it has parallels from burials in both the Gorny and steppe Altai regions. Daggers have otherwise only been found with male burials. Along with bows and quivers, they form the core of the Pazyryk warrior's equipment. Daggers from undisturbed graves are usually on the right thigh, and it seems that the Pazyryk people, like other nomads of the Scythian period, wore them strapped to the right thigh with a cord tying the chape to the leg to stop it flapping about. This is evident from the shape of the sheath, some of which still has fragments of the strapping. This way of wearing a dagger is also illustrated on Achaemenid reliefs showing Scythians on the Apadana at Persepolis in southern Iran, as well as in miniature on gold plaques from the Oxus Treasure (fig. 141). **evs**

Iron  
L. 27.8 cm  
Fourth to third century BC  
Chance find, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
(P. K. Frolov collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1122/59



Fig. 141  
Gold plaque from the Oxus Treasure, showing how an *akinakes* is strapped to the right thigh and the chape is secured with a cord tied around the leg. Gold. H. 15, W. 7.5 cm, wt 77 g. Fifth to fourth century BC.  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.48  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks





142–146  
**Knives and daggers**

Knives and daggers with animal imagery, either acquired through chance finds or excavated in graves across the vast southern Siberian steppe, show considerable variation in shape. They demonstrate the fusion of different traditions that created the Minusinsk valley (Tagar) culture of the Scythian period. This had a highly developed bronze-casting industry that extended to the forest-steppe region to the north-west. A very rare type of knife or dagger included a bodkin with a pommel in animal form, usually a wild boar, inserted within the hilt: it was held by a pin inside the hilt that fitted into a pair of slots on the bodkin and its handle (cat. 142). This design demanded particularly precise moulding by the maker. No examples of such a complex weapon design have yet been found in any other Scythian cultures. It is possible that these Tagar weapons are based on the hollow-hilt daggers made by barbarian tribes around the borders of ancient China. The complex technology may have been quickly forgotten among the Tagar tribes, but one legacy is the animal-shaped pommel emerging from a bracket that tops the solid hilts of Tagar knives and daggers. Some Tagar daggers (cat. 143) are closely paralleled by the precisely dated Arzhan-1 complex in Tuva. **KVC**

142. Dagger and awl with a boar-shaped pommel  
Bronze  
L. 21.2 cm (dagger); L. 5.2 cm (awl)  
Ninth to eighth century BC  
Chance find, southern Siberia (I. A. Lopatin collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 5531/278a-b

143. Dagger with decorated pommel  
The finial has previously been described as a wolf, but the long legs and bristly mane resemble a wild

ass. The guard is in the form of two protruding elks' heads with tall sharp ears in low relief at the base of the partly sunken hilt, which must originally have been set with a pair of thin plates, probably of horn; these must have been attached with glue, as there are no other means of attachment.<sup>80</sup>  
Bronze  
L. 21.8 cm  
Ninth to eighth century BC  
Chance find, southern Siberia (A. A. Bobrinsky collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 5544/23



144. Dagger without a guard, with a pommel representing wolves' protomes  
Bronze  
L. 23, W. 3.2 cm  
Eighth to seventh century BC  
Chance find, Kamskaya village, southern Siberia (I. A. Lopatin collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 5531/275

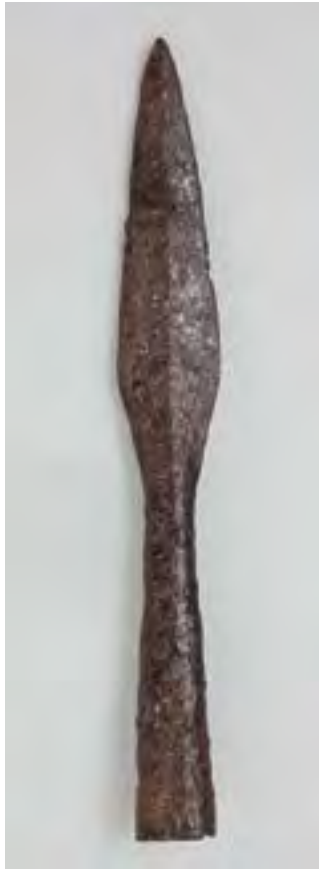


145. Knife with a pommel in the form of a boar, with fish on the hilt  
Bronze  
L. 19.4 cm  
Seventh to sixth century BC  
Chance find, Koryakovo village, southern Siberia (I. A. Lopatin collection)  
State Hermitage, St Petersburg, 5531/926



146. Knife with a pommel in the form of two addorsed goats  
Bronze  
L. 20.6 cm  
Seventh to sixth century BC  
Chance find, Potroshilova village, southern Siberia (E. K. Tevyashov collection)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1296/84





147  
**Spear head**

Spears were the main weapon used in the north-west Caucasus during the Scythian period. Finds from graves show that they were used by both chieftains and common soldiers. **TVR**

Forged iron  
L. 19.7 cm  
Seventh century BC  
Burial 26, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by L. K. Galanina, 1984)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2736-87



148  
**Helmet**

This rounded helmet has a nose guard, arched openings for the eyes and a vertical edge with a conical protrusion on the front; the holes on the lower part mark where cheekpieces and a back-flap were attached.<sup>81</sup> It was one of two excavated in this burial mound. The helmet represents the so-called Kuban type, as many are known from the Kuban region, but probably originated in the northern parts of China under the early Western Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–771 BC). Such helmets are typical of early Scythian archaeological assemblages but were later replaced by hammered versions of Greek type.<sup>82</sup>

**TVR, SUS**  
  
Cast bronze  
H. 16, W. 17, diam. 0.6 cm (openings), wt 1.5 kg  
Burial mound 2, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by N. I. Veselovsky, 1904)  
Second half of the seventh century BC  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2737/130



149  
**Scale body armour**

Scale armour was designed to protect warriors from fatal wounds caused by arrows or sword-blows to the heart, lungs, major blood vessels or bowels, and that used by the Scythians was generally reliable and simple. It was made by sewing metal scales onto a leather vest made of specially tanned cattle-skin. The individual scales measure between 2 and 5 cm in length: each overlapped half to two thirds of the one beneath it to form a triple or quadruple protective layer, but only the upper edges were stitched in order not to impede movement. The scales were straight along the top edge and rounded at the bottom and made of bronze, iron or horn. In order to produce them, a strip of metal sheet was cut into rectangular pieces and the lower ends filed to shape; iron scales were cut from non-tempered iron and then hardened by tempering. Armour was commonly worn, judging by finds in several hundred excavated Scythian tombs, but was not a guarantee of protection – a male warrior buried in full armour in burial mound 4 in the Izobil'noye group was killed by an arrow, and two armour plates in burial 3 in burial mound 1 near Opishne had been punctured by triangular holes, which suggest they had been punctured by trilobate arrowheads.<sup>83</sup> **TVR, SUS**

Forged iron  
H. 58, W. 54 cm  
Fifth century BC  
Burial mound 401, near the village of Zhurovka, Dnieper region, northern Black Sea (excavations by A. A. Bobrinsky, 1903)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1903 4/79



150

Wooden shield

This shield was manufactured from thick leather and cylindrical wooden rods, each about 1.2 cm in diameter. The cuts in the leather body of the shield were executed so that the sticks could be threaded through to create a decorative effect. The sticks are partially covered in red paint, which has been identified as cinnabar pigment. There are two additional small planks on the back, as well as a vertical loop



through which the warrior's rein arm could be inserted. The ends of the strap are fastened with knots along the face of the shield. Such shields were found both in royal and ordinary warrior graves. They were used throughout the Pazyryk culture. As well as actual shields, realistically painted wooden imitations were often placed in burials, and leather and wooden stick shields coated with Chinese varnish were found in the fourth burial mound at Pazyryk.<sup>84</sup> Small fragments of varnished leather survive on the sticks. In China, varnished leather was used on shields during the Han and Tang dynasties, as varnishing a shield made it more resilient.

Shields like this were mainly used by horsemen, and had to be light and reasonably small in size. When found in burials, they are usually strapped to the saddles of the horses. Despite their apparent fragility, a leather-and-stick shield was comfortable and effective, and not only did their light construction allow them to be easily held and carried, but experiments show how effective they were in catching arrows. Similar shields were carried by fighting Scythians represented on the spectacular Greco-Scythian gold comb found in the Solokha burial mound (fig. 121). The effectiveness of such shields is confirmed by their use extending beyond the Altai region and the Scythian period, and versions of different sizes and shapes are represented on Late Assyrian reliefs, described by Herodotus,<sup>85</sup> and shown in miniature on Achaemenid seals depicting the hunting of boars by dismounted riders;<sup>86</sup> they share many characteristics with much later shields found at the eastern Roman city of Dura on the Syrian Euphrates, which date to the third century AD.<sup>87</sup>

EVS, SUS

Wood, leather  
L. 40.5, W. 30 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/382

151

Shield

This is one of the largest Pazyryk shields. It has a convex top and a pair of transverse sticks along the top and bottom, but only tiny traces of the leather survive.

Wood  
L. 68, W. 50 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 3, Pazyryk, Altai mountains,  
southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1685/418



Horse headgear

This is sewn from felt and leather, and topped with a ram's head with a cock-like bird standing between its horns. The bird is detachable, its legs are made of whittled sticks, and its wings were made separately on a rod frame. The peak of the mask is decorated with seven fish made of gold foil. A great variety of horse masks were found in the Pazyryk burial mound.<sup>88</sup> Some were peaked and open at the front, while others were closed and entirely covered the horse's face; these are present in the first and fifth Pazyryk burial mounds. All had side flaps tied under the chin with small straps, and ear cases that allowed the mask to sit more securely on the head. They had felt bases covered in leather and were horned. During the earlier Pazyryk culture, the horns were goat-like, occasionally with some extra details. Later, the choice was widened to include fantastic deer antlers, as well as masks with finials made of felt and leather or wood, and in the shape of horned animals' heads: griffins, deer, rams and even horned predators, which appeared to maul the horse's head. Together with their mane covers and tail cases, these masks appeared to transform the horses into fantastic mythical creatures resembling the horned griffins depicted on Pazyryk chieftains' tattoos and plaques from Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.

The hoofed griffin is one of the most mysterious characters from the Pazyryk bestiary. It combined features from different beasts, and had a horse's body, horns, a long tail and a bird's head. The ends of the horns, tail and mane were often represented with small heads of birds of prey emerging from them (cat. 32). Predators and hoofed animals were also shown apparently emerging from the horns, whereas hoofed animals and eagles appeared on the bodies of the griffins (cat. 36). The iconography is extremely varied. Perhaps all images with hoofed animals combining features of different species were seen as variations of this single character. Depictions of creatures with the characteristics of a hoofed griffin are found throughout Scythian territories, but the closest parallels come from the eastern region spanning the Urals to Xinjiang, where scenes of a hoofed griffin being slain by a fantastic eagle or other fantastic predator were



very common. This combat scene was almost endlessly repeated on funerary objects. The masks and other elaborate fittings were mainly used on the personal or 'saddle horse' and spare mount of the deceased, which, having been transformed into hoofed griffins, were intended to carry their rider into the afterlife.<sup>89</sup> **EVS**

Felt, leather, wood, gold foil  
H. c. 50 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/414



Horse mask finial representing a fantastic bird head with a horn

This wooden finial of a horse mask from the third burial mound at Pazyryk had ears and stylized 'deer' antlers made of thick leather, dyed red, similar to the deer-head finial from the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk, although smaller. It was covered in gold leaf and partially dyed red with cinnabar pigment. Most likely the finial depicts the head of a hoofed griffin – a fantastic beast, combining the features of several ungulates, with fantastic horns and a bird's head. Wooden mask finials are typical of the late Pazyryk culture, and single examples of these were found in the third, fourth and fifth burial mounds there.<sup>90</sup> **EVS**

Wood, leather, gold foil  
H. 21.5, W. 15 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 3, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1685/397



OPPOSITE, BOTTOM  
Fig. 142  
Reconstruction of horse headgear.



154

**Jointed horse-bit with cheekpieces and bridle decoration**

At Arzhan-2 only the hard (inorganic) elements of the horse harness survived but these were found *in situ*, showing that the horses were buried with their gear.<sup>91</sup> Almost all the bridles were of the curb-bit type, with the two cheekpieces cast separately and attached to the bit. This type is well attested in the Aral Sea region and the Kazakh steppe, and its presence at Arzhan suggests connections with the early Iron Age Tasmola culture of central Kazakhstan. Curb-bit bridles may have been initially adopted under ancient Near Eastern or Transcaucasian influence. In the west, they were cast in single-use fired clay moulds, while the eastern nomads employed composite ones that could be reused; as many as twelve of the fourteen bridle sets from Arzhan-2 were cast from the same mould.<sup>92</sup> The nosebands of the horses buried at Arzhan-2 were decorated with beads shaped like the front branch of a deer antler, and are generally known in the Altai region during the early Scythian period. Assimilating horses to deer may have been related to their ritual sacrifice at funerals: some frozen burials of a much later date include complex masks with antlers on them (see cat. 153). **kvc**

Bridle set  
Two cheekpieces with loops; bits with rectangular endings, with remains of leather belt (2917/105/1-3); forehead plate with remains of belt (2917/106); small bridle decoration of conical shape (2917/107); big bridle decorations of conical shape (7. 2917/108/1-7)  
Seventh century BC  
Arzhan-2, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by K. V. Chugunov. H. Parzinger and A. Nagler, 2001)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

155

**Boar’s fang pendants**

Boar’s fang pendants were mostly used as horse-bridle decoration and are found on the bridles and chest straps, either singly or in lines or groups; as many as sixty boar fangs were used on horse gear found in burial mound 10 at Bashadar, implying the



slaughter of thirty wild boars. Occasionally, they were also attached to human belts. **LSM**

Tooth  
Second half of ninth to eighth century BC  
Arzhan-1, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by M. H. Mannai-ool and M. P. Gryaznov, 1973)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2878/186, 409, 179

156

**Bar cheekpiece**

Unusually, this has different ends: a wild boar with an elongated snout (left) and the head of an eagle.



Copper alloy; cast  
L. 17, W. 1.2 cm  
Sixth to fifth century BC  
Burial mound 12, Kyryk-II, Kazakhstan (M. N. Sydykov expedition, 2003)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 8770/3, TH2-1352

157

**Horse-bit with jointed mouthpiece and bar cheekpieces**

Jointed horse-bits or snaffles remain a popular type of horse-bit. They work on the principle that by pulling on the reins, the bit bends and the

cheekpieces converge, putting pressure on the lower jaw; pulling harder on one side allows the rider to control the lateral movement of the horse as there is greater pressure on that part of the horse's mouth.

Copper alloy; cast  
L. 17.5, W. 2–6 cm  
Sixth to fifth century BC  
Burial mound 12, Kyryk-II, Kazakhstan (M. N. Sydykov expedition, 2003)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 991

Bridle

The bridle decoration of horse 7 from burial mound 2 at Bashadar follows the style of that of horse 2 from the same burial mound, except in material: the pendant plaques were carved from wood rather than cast from bronze. The bronze cheekpieces of both bridles were made from the same mould; both sets were covered with gold foil and would have looked identical. The wooden plaques were comparatively smaller, rather fine and elegant. Original wooden plaques were usually much larger and cruder (cats 159–60). Bronze plaques from the same burial mound at Bashadar had two loops on the reverse, through which the bridle straps were passed during manufacture. Wooden plaques had four small holes used to attach the plaque to the bridle thongs using thin straps. The bronze plaques from later burial mounds at Tuekta had connecting holes similar to the wooden examples. In the early Pazyryk culture the chief elements of bridle decoration were large pendant plaques of bronze and wood with a bar or circle at the base. The main plaque and cheekpiece-tip ornament was an asymmetric leaf, which may be a stylized griffin head.<sup>93</sup> This design is useful for dating, and objects bearing it are widely represented in burials of the mid-sixth to early fifth centuries BC from Altai to the southern Urals.<sup>94</sup> The cheekpieces and horse bit were cast from arsenical bronze (with 2–3% arsenic, less than 0.8% nickel and minor trace elements). **EVS**

Wood, bronze, gold foil  
L. 27 cm (cheekpieces); L. 21.7 cm (bit); diam. 7.8 cm (forehead plaque)  
Late sixth to early fifth century BC  
Burial mound 2, Bashadar, Altai, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,  
1793/407, 455–59, 463, 470–73, 475–81, 484–88, 490–92, 497, 499–500





This bridle has a complete set of wooden plaques, cheekpieces and reins. It is made of round straps that maintain their shape, elasticity and the light colour of rawhide. Its structure is typical of the Scythian period: two crowns, a nose and a chin strap, a fork for connecting the cheekpieces with the head straps, a pair of straight cheekpieces and a braided bridle. The plaques and cheekpiece terminals were made to look like fantastic eagle heads. The bits are made of arsenical bronze, and similar examples were used alongside iron examples throughout the Pazyryk culture.

Round rawhide straps are still widely used in making bridles in the Altai, Tuva, Mongolia and Kazakhstan. Bull and deer hide is used, mostly taken from the neck.<sup>95</sup> In early Scythian times round straps were used extensively to make bridles and chest straps, judging by the shape of the holes in many of the fittings and ornaments; many were also braided. The durability and function of everyday round-strap bridles probably made them popular in Altai and beyond for the entire Scythian period. The special-occasion bridles of round straps we have today mostly come from the later Pazyryk culture in the third century BC, when large pendant plaques (cats 158, 160) fall out of fashion. **EVS**

Leather, wood, bronze, gold foil  
L. 16 cm (forehead plaque); L. 22.7 and 18.5 cm (cheekpieces); L. 8.5 cm (griffins' heads)  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 3, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1685/47



This exceptionally well-preserved bridle has the straps as well as the decorative elements. The Pazyryk bridles are structurally similar to the headbands still used by nomad herders in Eurasia. They had a noseband, two crown pieces and two chest straps.

It is typical of its time. To connect the reins to the bridle there were two-holed cheekpieces connected to the bit. When connecting flat crown pieces with cheekpieces, a fork would be formed by slicing along through them. To attach the straps to the holes in the cheekpieces, knots were tied at their ends, metal rivets were put through and the end of the strap went into the slit cut into its own length. Two-linked

bits with a ring tip were mainly iron, and bronze more rarely. A halter was attached to the left-hand ring on the bit and the reins to the right. The reins usually ended in a leather loop, which the halter would fit through; occasionally, a halter bar would be attached instead of the loop. Bronze halter bars, widely found in the early Scythian period, continued to be used in the early Pazyryk culture, replaced



later by wooden and bone bars. After fitting the loop (or bar) through, the halter was knotted. Thus the upper part of the halter acted as the left rein, while its lower end was used to control and tie the horse when dismounting. An important element of the decoration was the ends of the cheekpieces. This bridle has straight perforated cheekpieces, decorated with heads of

fantastic eagles. In the middle Pazyryk culture (fourth to the beginning of the third century BC), tips in the shape of asymmetrical leaves began to fall out of use; the more popular decorations were fantastic eagle heads with impressive crests, heads and protomes of predators, rams and various palmettes.<sup>96</sup> In making cheekpieces, the Pazyryk people used wood, bronze and bone. Wooden cheekpieces, with

the exception of a number of imitations made for funerary use, were functional. They were almost twice as thick as their bronze equivalents, and their inner surface is always smooth and slightly convex in order to push the ends away from the horse's muzzle. Only the outer surfaces were covered with leather, as constant contact with the corners of the horse's mouth would have dampened the leather. Some cheekpieces have traces of repair: the end of one cheekpiece in this bridle, in the shape of the head of a fantastic eagle with a flame-like crest, had been lost during use, and replaced with a new head different from the original.

This bridle was decorated with five fantastic eagle plaques (at the crossing of the straps and at the centre of the noseband) and four intervening plaques with a ram's head in the jaws of a predator. The predator has an elongated 'wolf's snout' and curved antlers with spheres on their tips. A master carver represented the ram's fringe in a similar style to the predators' antlers, which makes the asymmetrical plaque appear balanced. Pazyryk art in the middle and late stages of its development used the image of a wolf-like predator much more. Often it had antlers. At the end of the fourth century BC images of lions with antelope horns ending in small spheres reached Altai and Inner Asia, practically replacing all other versions of feline predators. At around the same time, these horns also found their way onto the heads of the wolf-like characters. The ornament was completed with wooden forks, decorated with a rolling wave pattern. All the three-dimensional pieces of the bridle ornament (the eagle heads) had separately made leather details for ears and crests, and the wooden and leather elements were covered with gold and tin leaf. Overall, the bridle ornamentation would have been exceptionally opulent and imposing. **EVS**

Leather, wood, bronze  
L. 21, 25 cm (cheekpieces); L. 12.5, 11.2 cm (forks); H. 10–10.5 cm (plaques)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/400

Saddle chest strap

The chest collars of the Pazyryk saddles had extra straps fastened at the withers, as well as a main strap attached to the girth straps, just like modern chest collars of this type. Similarly designed chest collars continued to be used by the Parthians, Sasanians and Huns in later periods. The Pazyryk chest collars were usually made from flat rather than circular straps, and their design followed that of the bridle set. This chest collar is decorated in a style typical of the middle Pazyryk culture, with large pendant plaques representing fantastic eagles and palmettes. All the details were originally covered in gold and tin leaf. **EVS**

Leather, wood, gold  
L. 128,5 cm (strap); H. 9, W. max. 10,5 cm (plaques)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/420



Saddle with sweat-cloth, decorative cover and a crupper

This richly decorated saddle belonged to the 'personal saddle horse' of the chieftain from mound 5 at Pazyryk. This is a typical soft Scythian saddle: its decoration is characteristic of the late Pazyryk culture, but this general type was developed by nomads by the seventh century BC and widely used from Greece to China up until the second century AD.<sup>97</sup>

Scythian saddles were made of leather panels tightly packed with hay and deer hair and sewn together, so that there was a comfortable seat between the stuffed sections. They had high semicircular supports, two at both front and back, with knee and hip panels corresponding to the panels on a modern English saddle. Sometimes the supports were reinforced and had wood or horn arches along the top. The fronts of the panels were somewhat wider, forming 'wings', again like those on a modern English saddle. Soft Scythian saddles



lacked a solid frame and pommels, but all the other basic saddle elements used today were present: saddle panels, sweat-cloths, girth straps, bellybands, bellyband buckles, chest bands and cruppers.

This saddle has relatively low supports. The panels were stuffed with deer fur, and the stitching made with horsehair cord. The ends of the wide, thick leather belt acted as girth straps. The bellyband and buckle are missing. The sweat-cloth was fixed to the inner side of the panels with thin straps. The base of the decorative cover was made of leather squares, onto which was sewn a chequerboard appliqué of red wool, with squares of blue fur and varnished red leather triangles, fine-leather strips and gold circle piping. The red squares had four-petal Chinese taffeta-type silk rosettes glued onto them, with gold leaf in the centre. The varnished triangles had leather gold-leaf-covered appliqué in the shape of a deer or elk head shown frontally. **EVS**

Saddle: leather, plucked deer hair, sinew threads, wood; sweat-cloth: felt; cover: leather, woollen textile, lacquer, fur, silk, gold  
L. 50 cm (saddle)  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 5, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/195, 196-200, 207-210, 211-213



Saddle cover showing a griffin

This remarkable image of a griffin is an appliqué made from small pieces of coloured felt. The detail contours are embroidered with stem stitch. The cover was finished along the edges with blue felt piping, with thin straps on either side: these were both decorative and functional, as they allowed it to be fixed to the saddle. Despite popular belief, griffin images are extremely rare in Altai and were unusual even in the Pazyryk culture. The earliest phase had only one example, from the first Tuekta burial mound, and this shows ancient Near Eastern traits.<sup>98</sup> The griffin is rearing up on its hind legs, with its head reversed, but in accordance with Scythian styles, the upper body is also turned back, which gives it an awkward look.

Some 130 years separate this from the griffins on three felt covers found in the earlier burial mounds 1 and 2 at Pazyryk, and there are none from the intervening period. The Pazyryk griffins were shown completely differently and are much more ‘realistic’, resembling those shown on ancient Greek vases

and reliefs, but the circles, half-horseshoes and triangles on their bodies resemble figures on Achaemenid glazed bricks from Susa, and even earlier Late Assyrian reliefs. All three griffins have hippocampus crests, which also appear on images of eagles from the same burial mounds (cat. 36), and eagle heads on two sets of cheekpieces from burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3, built about the same time. We are therefore dealing with a relatively short-lived phase, perhaps connected with the late fourth- and early third-century BC art of the Hellenistic states founded in the Persian Empire after Alexander the Great. We can speculate that some nomads from the Altai region campaigned in those regions, particularly as some artefacts brought to Altai were probably ancient booty, and we are left with the impression that the variety of objects from mounds 1 and 2 at Pazyryk reflect a deep fascination with the syncretic art of the Hellenistic period in the ancient east (cat. 58). **EVS**

Felt  
L. 57, W. 30 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/325



Saddle cover showing a tiger attacking an elk

This remarkable piece of appliqué showing an animal contest scene was cut from a single piece of leather and used to decorate a felt saddle cover worn by horse 2 in burial mound 1 at Pazyryk. The elk was covered in tin leaf, while the tiger was dyed yellow with sienna (a mineral pigment), and the details highlighted in brown. The cover had two such appliqués, one on either side. The high-quality fine felt used to make it was dyed blue and decorated with fish-shaped pendants, six suspended on either side. These were cut from thick leather, with the outside covered in blue fur and decorated with strips of tin leaf and a red horsehair fringe.<sup>99</sup> Contest-scene appliqués must have been glued directly onto the felt as no seam holes were found, which also means that the decoration was made specially for the funeral. The gear belonging to horse 2 included a mask, a tail bag and a mane cover (cat. 170). **EVS**

Leather  
L. 34, W. max. 21 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/250



165

**Saddle pendant in the shape of a fish with a ram's head in its mouth**

This is one of a set of four pendants belonging to a decorative saddle cover, and is in the shape of a fish holding a ram's head in its mouth. Long zoomorphic saddle pendants, four per saddle, are typical of early and middle Pazyryk culture. They were usually made in the shape of a fish or a wolf-like predator: the second Bashadar burial mound had one set with fish and another with wolves; the first burial mound at Pazyryk had fish; and in burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3, three had fish and one had wolves.<sup>100</sup> Exceptionally, a set of pendants from the first burial mound at Pazyryk was made in the shape of a fantastic horned predator.<sup>101</sup> All the pendants had a leather base, onto which felt or gold foil appliqué were sewn or glued. These were clearly elements of ceremonial decoration, as they were long and easily detached from the saddle, to which they were tied with only a few fine straps. The possible origins of these pendants may be the second Bashadar burial mound, where similar pendants were found.<sup>102</sup> These were decorated with sewn-on wooden plaques (round, crescent-shaped or comma-shaped), covered in gold foil or embroidery. In one case the combination of plaques creates a fish shape. The vane resembles the pieces suspended from the horse-cloths of the riding and chariot horses from Late Assyrian reliefs in the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–626 BC).<sup>103</sup> However, this similarity may be explained through the use originally of a skin with dangling legs. **EVS**

Felt, leather, gold foil  
L. max. 58 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/415



166

**Saddle cover with geometric decoration**

This saddle cover was made by stitching together multicoloured felt triangles with sinew. Earlier Pazyryk sites show a wide variety of quilted covers, often imitated with appliqué. Small pieces of felt, textile, leather and fur, mostly square or rectangular, were used to sew covers and garments, and the same technique was used on the calves of fur boots found in the second Bashadar burial mound (cat. 38) and leather trousers from the first burial mound at Tuekta (cat. 50). **EVS**

Felt  
L. 29.5, H. 16 cm  
Late sixth to early fifth century BC  
Burial mound 2, Bashadar, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1793/822



Saddle-cover decoration showing eagles

This fine red felt decorative saddle cover was decorated with yellow and blue figures of eagles sewn in a chequer pattern with sinew. The contours and detail of the birds have been stem-stitched with wool. Ornamental Scythian saddle covers were made from various materials such as leather, fur, textile and even knotted rugs, but most were felt. They covered the entire surface of the saddle and were fixed onto it with fine straps tied at several points around the edge. The edges of the saddle supports were fixed with additional saddle arches of wood, horn or thick leather. Covers were decorated with plaques, pendants and appliqués made of felt and leather, the felt appliqués being the most hard-wearing. Cover ornaments, like other elements of horse gear, evolved over time. Large solitary animal figures and scenes of mauling appear during the fourth and early third centuries BC (cats 163–64). More characteristic of early saddle covers were smaller felt appliqués showing rosettes and animals

filling the whole cover. Judging by representations, Scythian saddles were used both with and without covers, and in the latter case they show the quilting of the saddle panels, for example on belt plates showing the ‘under-the-tree’ scene (cat. 15). Decorative saddle covers are clearly seen on the murals of the Stasovsky Crypt. Although these images belong to a later period, i.e. the first half of the second century AD, structural features of the Bosporan Sarmatian saddles link them to the Scythian examples. **EVS**

Felt  
L. 31.5, H. 15 cm  
Late sixth to early fifth century BC  
Burial mound 2, Bashadar, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1793/816



Medallion saddle decoration showing a spiral made of eagles’ heads

Pazyryk saddles, like other Scythian saddles, had four semicircular support elements, two at both front and back, which correspond to the knee and hip panels of the modern English saddle and were made by stuffing the saddle panels (cat. 162). On the outside the supports were decorated either with hard plates of bone, wood or thick leather, or appliqués of felt, leather and gold foil. During the late sixth and fifth centuries BC, the Pazyryk saddle supports were mainly decorated with felt medallions, with sewn-on coloured felt openwork appliqués mainly showing stylized representations of fantastic eagles. This medallion shows a spiral design originally made up of six eagles’ heads with ears. Part of the appliqué is lost, but seams on the felt base allow reconstruction of the original design (fig. 143). Decorative medallions like this originally

completely covered leather saddle sheaths of the same shape. Most of the leather from the second Bashadar burial mound has perished, but the size of felt medallions from that site show that their supports were considerably taller than those of later saddles, as much as 20 cm high. This discovery is confirmed by finds from other early Pazyryk burial mounds, such as the first and second burial mounds at Tuekta, where the saddle covers and even support arches have survived very well.<sup>104</sup> **EVS**

Felt  
L. 20, W. 24 cm  
Late sixth to early fifth century BC  
Burial mound 2, Bashadar, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1793/817

Fig. 143  
Reconstruction of the pattern of the felt medallion from the second Bashadar burial mound.



Saddlecloth decoration: woollen embroidery of a winged bull

This exceptionally well-preserved fragment shows a rampant or leaping winged bull and was originally part of a saddlecloth.<sup>105</sup> Saddles constructed from wood, felt and textiles were in use in the Pazyryk culture, and harnessed horses were killed as part of funeral ceremonies. On this fragment, two colours were used – brown and blue-green – and perhaps beige as well. The eye, ear, horn, hooves and tail were accentuated with different coloured threads. The mane and muscles are indicated in a steppe-Pazyryk way reminiscent of Achaemenid art. A row of small bluish-green circles emphasizes the upper edge of a wing with alternating feathers, again reminiscent of Achaemenid tradition. Embroidery, felt and inlay in such pieces use the same geometric method for tracing the schemes of shapes and colours. The winged bull is a well-known mythical Achaemenid creature of the fifth century BC in Iran, but there are much earlier examples from the eighth century BC, and it found its way into the Scythian art of the Altai at Berel, where it was locally adopted and adapted. **H·PF, ZS**

H. c. 16 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 11, Berel, northern Kazakhstan  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, KP YM 1585 368



Mane cover with appliqué cockerels

This mane cover was worn by horse 2 in burial mound 1 at Pazyryk and is made from a rectangular piece of felt, folded in two, with a fine-leather cover which still has traces of the tin leaf originally glued over it.<sup>106</sup> Glued to each side were four cockerels with gold-leaf heads, and at the bottom is a strip of gold foil. The reversed heads of the cockerels imitate the curls on the mane of the hoofed griffin, which ended in birds' heads (cat. 32). The spine of the mane cover had a horsehair fringe: strands of red horsehair, folded in two and tied with fine straps sewn with sinew to secure them vertically, were threaded through a thin strap measuring 0.5 cm across. Before the mane cover was put on, the trimmed mane was covered with a piece of thick felt, folded in two, which, along with the mane, was stitched through with a length of cord. Afterwards the mane cover was placed over this base and fastened with straps around the horse's neck. The mane covers and masks were removed during

the burial of the horses, but the stitched-through felt was left on the manes.

The mane cover, mask and tail case (cats 152–53, 171) were designed to transform the horse into a mythical creature, a hoofed griffin. **EVS**

Felt, leather, gold foil  
L. 59, W. 13.5 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/275



171

Case for a horse tail

This tail case belonged to horse 10 from Pazyryk-1 and consists of a long tube trimmed at the bottom with a strip of blue fur and a red horsehair fringe.

It was sewn from two strips, each made from rhomboid patches of leather in two alternating colours. Mosaic appliquéés in the shape of curls inserted into the diamonds also alternate in colour. The case was attached to the tail with a thin leather square-shaped tie, with leather straps tied together in pairs. The hair on the dock part of the tail placed inside the case was shaved. In Pazyryk burial mound 1, masks, mane covers and tail cases were used to adorn two horses (2 and 10). In other Pazyryk burial mounds, the number of horses transformed in this way varies from one in burial mound 5 at Pazyryk to as many as eight in burial mound 1 at Tuekta, although two was more normal. **EVS**

Leather, horsehair  
L. c. 65, diam. 3.8 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/484



172

Horse tail plait of three strands, with a knot at the end

The tails of the horses from Pazyryk burials, if not covered, were usually braided into plaits made of three or sometimes five strands. These were occasionally knotted and the hair at the dock was trimmed.<sup>107</sup> The manes were also trimmed. The second Pazyryk burial mound contained the remains of bay, chestnut and black horses, without spots. The horses' height ranged from 135 to 150 cm. **EVS**

Horsehair  
L. c. 81 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/530





173  
**A cheetah-head accessory**

This triangular 'cushion', stuffed with wild grass, was found with a horse burial in the first Pazyryk burial mound, next to horse gear set 4, which belonged to one of the horses.<sup>108</sup> The top is made from the fur of a cheetah's head and the eye slits filled with red cloth. The bottom is sewn from pieces of thick leather, with openwork appliqué from finer leather left over from a larger object. The back is a plain oval piece of leather. All the stitching was carried out with sinew. The function of this object is unclear. Its size and shape resemble a horned lion head adorning the pommel of a horse's mask from the same burial complex (horse gear set 5), and it may therefore have been part of a lost or unfinished horse's mask. This is not the only item found at Pazyryk that was made of feline fur. Leopards were still found in the Altai region until the early twentieth century, and the Asiatic cheetah

was only made extinct in the nearby desert during the same period. **EVS**

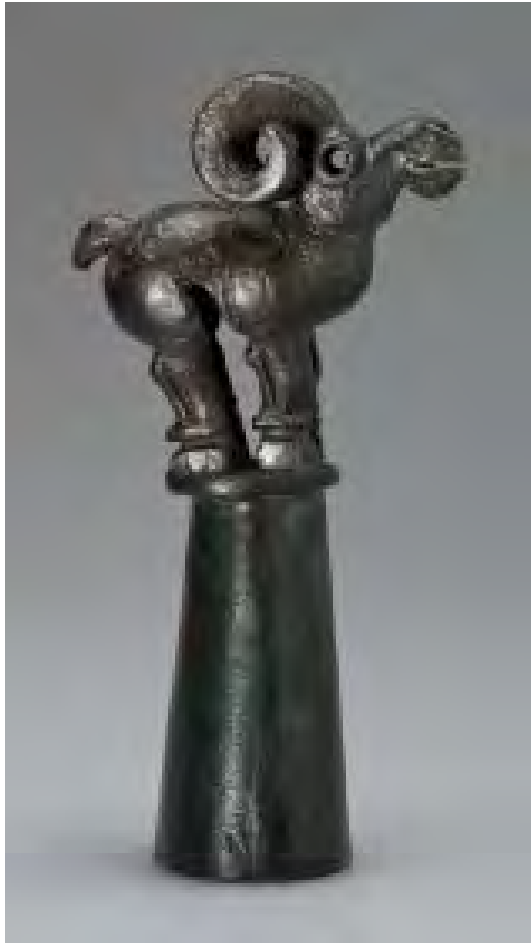
Fur, leather, textile  
H. 15, L. 12, W. 12 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/233

174  
**Felt figure of a swan**

Four identical swan figures were deposited with the horse burials in burial mound 5 at Pazyryk, along with a dismantled four-wheeled cart and large felt rug or hanging showing a horseman and seated female figure. There has been considerable discussion over the reconstruction and function of the cart and the hanging. One idea is that the felt

was erected as an outdoor enclosure where the corpse was prepared for burial, and the swans were erected at the top of this canopy. However, it is more likely that the swans were instead connected with the cart itself, which had a tall lattice cabin roofed with black felt.<sup>109</sup> The swans were made of sewn pieces of felt and stuffed with straw. Their expressive colouring (black bills, black flight feathers, yellowish-red tail) is completely unnatural, but such imaginary birds appear in the art of Pazyryk in the late fourth century BC and partially replace the griffins that previously featured in animal combat scenes (cat. 36). **EVS, SUS**

Felt  
L. 25 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 5, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/262



175  
**Finial representing a mountain goat**

This bronze finial is in the form of a standing mountain goat or ram with raised head and tightly curled horns. The eyes are round holes, the lips thin and pursed, the nostrils well defined. The body of the ram is small, with a pronounced front shoulder and a small tail. The legs are straight and outlined with a relief contour. It stands on top of a conical tube that was nailed onto a wooden shaft. The object was cast using the lost-wax technique, whereby an original was made of wax, encased in clay and heated, and the melted wax replaced with hot bronze poured in through casting channels left in the sides of the clay mould. **LSM**



Bronze  
H. 11.4 cm  
Eighth century BC  
Chamber 26, Arzhan-1, Piy-Khem region, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by M. H. Mannai-ool and M. P. Gryaznov, 1973)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2878/4

176  
**Pommel representing an elk**

In 1735 the chronicler and member of the 'academic squad' of the second Kamchatka (Great Northern) expedition, the German Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783), bought a selection of chance finds in Krasnoyarsk, among which there are seven notable pieces. The earliest of the objects in this collection is the top of a bronze pommel in the shape of a hollow standing elk figure. The head of the animal is straight, the bulky muzzle elongated, the neck

short. The elk's eyes are two circular hollows; the top and bottom lips are pronounced; the ears are horizontal. The branched antlers are tilted downwards, with their tines pointing up. The proportions of the body and legs are shortened, the legs coming to a single point. The bottom of the pommel is incomplete. This object may have been a ritual-dagger pommel and was cast with the lost-wax technique. **LSM**

Bronze  
H. 6.6 cm  
Eighth century BC  
Chance find, Yenisei region, Krasnoyarsk, southern Siberia (acquired by G. F. Müller, 1735)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1121/4



177–180

**Decorated bronze terminals**

Decorated metal terminals or ‘pole tops’ like these are among the most typical archaeological finds associated with the Scythians.<sup>110</sup> Their original function is uncertain, but it is clear that they played a role in funerary rituals and were probably attached to horses or carts. All feature small bells or balls contained within a hollow cage, meaning that they would have tinkled or rattled in motion. The earliest types are shaped like a ball with vertical slits in it. The origin of such terminals seems to go back to the Western Zhou dynasty in China (c. 1046–771 bc). The deer figure on one of these examples is executed in the peculiar early ‘Animal Style’ of east Eurasia (cat. 177). In later periods, such motifs became less prominent, and the griffin on another resembles examples from eastern Greece (cat. 178). By the sixth century bc, most terminals had several bells and a flat head with a Scythian-style animal figure on the top. **tvr**

177. Terminal with an openwork bell and a deer figurine  
Cast bronze  
H. 24, diam. 10.6 cm (bell)  
First half of the seventh century bc  
Burial mound near the village of Makhoshevskaya, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (chance find, 1895)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2496/2

178. Terminal with an openwork bell and a griffin's head  
Cast bronze  
H. 35, diam. 11.5 cm (bell)  
Seventh century bc  
Burial mound 3, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by D. G. Schultz, 1904)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Ku 1903-1904 1/44

179. Terminal shaped like a bird of prey  
Cast bronze  
H. 26.5 cm  
Sixth century bc  
Burial mound 2 near the village of Ulsky, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by N. I. Veselovsky, 1909)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Ku 1909 1/111

180. Terminal with an openwork bell  
Cast bronze  
H. 17, diam. 0.6 cm (bell)  
First half of the seventh century bc  
Burial mound 2, Kelermes, Kuban region, north-west Caucasus (excavations by N. I. Veselovsky, 1904)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2737/117



## 7 Death and burial





# Death and burial

E. F. Korolkova

The burial-places of the kings are in the land of the Gerrhi, which is the end of the navigation of the Borysthenes. There, whenever the king has died, the Scythians dig a great four-cornered pit in the ground; when this is ready they take up the dead man – his body enclosed in wax, his belly cut open and cleansed and filled with cut marsh-plants and frankincense, and parsley and anise seed, and sewn up again – and carry him on a wagon to another tribe. Then those that receive the dead man at his coming do the same as do the Royal Scythians; that is, they cut off a part of their ears, shave their heads, make cuts round their arms, tear their foreheads and noses, and pierce their left hands with arrows. Thence the bearers carry the king’s body on the wagon to another of the tribes which they rule, and those to whom they have already come follow them; and having carried the dead man to all in turn, they are in the country of the Gerrhi, the farthest distant of all tribes under their rule, and at the place of burial. Then, having laid the dead in the tomb on a couch, they plant spears on each side of the body and lay across them wooden planks, which they then roof over with plaited osiers; in the open space which is left in the tomb they bury, after strangling, one of the king’s concubines, his cupbearer, his cook, his groom, his squire, and his messenger; besides horses, and first-fruits of all else, and golden cups; for the Scythians make no use of silver or bronze. Having done this they all build a great barrow of earth, vying enviously with one another to make this as great as may be.<sup>1</sup>

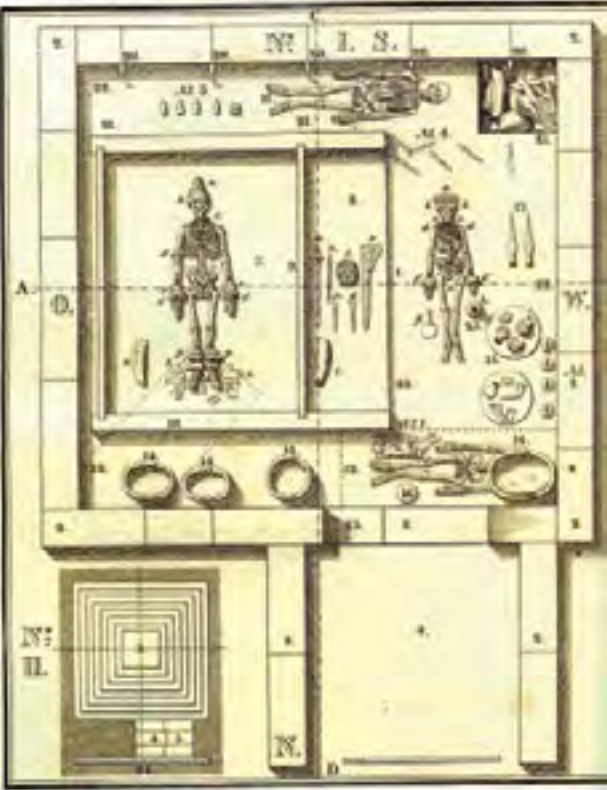
This description by Herodotus of royal Scythian burial practices paints a vivid picture and one that is supported by archaeological finds, but before looking

at the evidence for Scythian rituals and practices, a few introductory remarks are necessary. Everyone will perish one day. The inevitability of death helps to create a virtual circle of life and death, which forms an underlying and central theme of global mythologies, religions and philosophies, and for millennia has shaped individual and collective experiences.<sup>2</sup> The French comparative philologist Georges Dumézil drew particular attention to parallels between Scythian rituals and the Ossetian heroic epic of the north Caucasus known as *Tales of the Narts*, and concluded that ‘the thought of either an individual or a collective death was a casual one for the peoples who faced constant dangers in the vast, naturally boundless steppes of the northern coast of the Black Sea littoral’.<sup>3</sup> The funerary rite is one of the earliest in human history. At its core is the belief in an afterlife and the conviction that life on earth is followed by some other form of existence, rather than total oblivion. Therefore, the next stage is as natural as life itself and represents a passage into a world that is not simply the world of death, but also a source of new life. The path to this other world is considered long and treacherous, and requires rituals to be performed at the funeral, with food and drink for the sustenance of the deceased. Funerary rites are also considered necessary in order to ensure passage beyond the world of the living, maintain a sense of universal order, and help to propagate the life cycles of nature and society: as a result the living are protected, and the dead are allowed to rest and given the chance of rebirth. The idea of the unity and interrelation of life and death is shared by many cultures, both extinct and current, and is so central to human culture that it is seen by some scholars as a defining feature separating man and animal: ‘the life–death ideology has led man out of the animal

Fig. 144  
The unrobbed double burial at  
Arzhan-2.



Fig. 145  
Plan showing the arrangement  
of the burial chambers in the  
Kul' Oba burial mound.



kingdom’, and the relationship between life and death lies at the heart of all rituals concerned with transition.<sup>4</sup> Ancient concepts of life and death are directly reflected in funerary customs; for instance, the position of the corpse may imitate a sleeping person or embryo and allow the opportunity to awaken or be reborn, and in both cases illustrates a renewal of the life cycle. The orientation of the body may also be important, as it may point the deceased in the direction of the ‘other world’. Other details may be of great importance for a funerary ritual, including the position of the hands and feet, and whether the body is on its back, front, side or sitting up, although these may vary according to the social standing of the deceased (figs 144–45). Finally, in addition to the funerary rite, there exists an entire ritual system stretching over long periods that is directly linked to concepts of death and afterlife, and in some cultures there is the additional problem of how to preserve the corpse. This essay now explores these theoretical issues in more detail within the context of Scythian concepts of life and death and how these might be illustrated by the archaeological remains from sites such as Pazyryk and Ak-Alakha in the high Altai region. During winter and spring the ground is completely

frozen, and it is impossible to dig a grave. In such cases the corpse had to be preserved until the weather improved and it could be buried, and detailed methods were developed for this. During the Scythian period mummification was standard practice for the nomad nobility and other people in this region. The bodies were then placed in a log chamber constructed at the foot of a grave shaft. They were accompanied by various objects, and their favourite horses were slaughtered and interred outside the north side of the chamber and facing the direction of the rising sun to the east. The shaft was then filled and the spot covered by a thick stone mound. The effects of the deliberate mummification were enhanced because of the particular circumstances where the ground below the burial mounds never defrosted in the summer and therefore maintained permafrost (see fig. 149). This has preserved not only the bodies but also the organic grave goods interred with them, and it is mainly because of this, rather than the ancient mummification, that we have these exceptional remains.<sup>5</sup> All the burial mounds at Pazyryk had been looted in antiquity, not just for the grave goods, but also to desecrate the buried chiefs. The bodies of the noble

couple from the second Pazyryk burial mound have therefore only survived in pieces, mainly because they had been thrown out of the coffins by looters and beheaded. Fortunately, the chief and his consort found in the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk are much better preserved (fig. 146). These and other surviving human remains help to reconstruct the ancient techniques of mummification and show this was the work of skilled people. All the skulls had traces of post-mortem trepanation where small openings were made at the back of the head, through which the brain was extracted and the cranial cavity then packed with horsehair, pine needles and larch cones. The internal organs of the deceased were removed through incisions in the abdomen and replaced by plant stalks. Through cuts in the undersides of the arms and legs, and sometimes the back, neck, hands and soles of the feet, muscle tissue was also extracted, and the slits sewn up with thread made of tendons or horsehair.<sup>6</sup> The exact techniques used by the embalmers varied from individual to individual, even within the same burial mound, which implies both a deeply rooted tradition and multiple practitioners. The head and body of the woman from the second burial mound at Pazyryk had been saturated with a sap-like substance, which scientific analysis shows to contain shellac and beeswax. The skin of the man from the same burial mound had been treated with a different mixture with some additional oil and wax.<sup>7</sup> A compelling feature of the Altai mummies is the ‘Animal Style’ tattoos preserved on their skin, and their individual designs, overall compositions and incorporation of zoomorphic images add much to our understanding of the Scythian nomad’s world view.<sup>8</sup>

The custom of mummification may originate in the concept that an intact body is a prerequisite for a successful afterlife. Herodotus mentions a brutal Scythian sacrifice ritual in which

they pour wine on the men’s heads and cut their throats over a vessel; then they carry the blood up on to the pile of sticks and pour it on the scimitar [*akinakes*]. So they carry the blood aloft, but below by the sacred pile they cut off all the slain men’s right arms and hands and throw these in the air, and presently depart when they have sacrificed the rest of the victims; the arm lies where it has fallen, and the body apart from it.<sup>9</sup>

Similar rituals are echoed in the Ossetian epic *Tales of the Narts*, mentioned above. This includes passages referring to how one Batraz avenged the death of his father, as well as the story of the Nart Totraz, who was slain by Shoshlan but given the chance to return from the dead in order to avenge his own death. Batraz slew his enemy and took the dead man’s hand to his mother and mother-in-law as proof of revenge. Once the act of revenge was demonstrated, both women are said to have begged for the arm to be returned to the body, ‘as it is the custom of the Narts not to give burial to a body that is missing some part of it’.<sup>10</sup> There are different explanations for these rituals: without an arm the deceased may have been thought incapable of taking revenge on his killers; alternatively, the mutilation may have been performed as a form of debasement of the enemy’s body. In either case the act destroyed the integrity of the body and removed the possibility of intact burial and a peaceful afterlife.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 146  
Mummy of a chieftain in his coffin  
in burial mound 5 at Pazyryk.



Fig. 147  
The stone mound of burial mound 5  
at Pazyryk.

The funerary ritual may have been considered a transitional phase for the deceased, but in the absence of inscriptions we must rely on the archaeological evidence from burials to reconstruct Eurasian nomad rituals. The ancient cyclical view of the universe sees rebirth as another stage in the life of an individual, as it begins a new life in another existential state. This rebirth goes along with ideas of cosmic design and the start of the new year.<sup>12</sup> The funerary cult is therefore understood as a collection of mystical beliefs connected with the ritual of burying and venerating the dead, which echoes the cult of the ancestor. The Scythian funerary ritual also had a genealogical quality, as evidenced in contemporary but foreign written sources that describe the special regard Scythians had for graves of their ancestors. We see an example of this in the stand-off reported by Herodotus between Darius and the Scythian king Idanthyrsus: responding to Darius’ accusation of cowardice, the Scythian king retorts by saying:

I have never fled for fear of any man, nor do I now flee from you ... But if nothing will serve you but fighting straightway, we have the graves of our fathers; come, find these and essay to destroy them; then shall you know whether we will fight you for those graves or not.<sup>13</sup>

Ordinarily, nomads interred their dead beneath burial mounds, which stood out in the flat landscape of the

plains (fig. 147). These were more than just simple mounds, and were carefully constructed and followed a design that reflected the beliefs and customs of their builders. The burial mounds of the military elite were particularly large affairs and clustered in groups. Their construction followed the ancient idea of passage into the ‘other world’, the world of the dead. The funerary ritual therefore included an entire set of strictly prescribed actions and implements, although these varied in detail between different cultures. Every small detail of a ritual probably had its own significance, including grave goods, their position in the burial mound, the style of ornaments, and the types of weapons and everyday utensils.

The superstructure consisted of a mound built of rocks or turf sods that covered the sunken grave pit or burial chamber where the dead body was placed. Where woodland was easily accessible, as in the Altai, the burial pit included a wooden log structure, a sort of house for the dead (figs 148–51) in which a separately carved larch-log sarcophagus was placed (fig. 146). These were sometimes carved with complex ‘Animal Style’ designs, or were decorated with cut-out appliqués (cats 181–84). The dead body of a higher-ranking tribesman was often accompanied by his dependents, who must have been expected to stay by his or her side during death, as they had in life. The objects placed in the grave had the dual purpose of serving their owner and indicating his or her social status and ethnicity: hence we see strictly utilitarian





Fig. 148  
Section through an ancient nomad  
burial mound.  
Archive of the Institute for the History  
of Material Culture, St Petersburg

items such as drinking vessels and rugs, as well as highly ornate and sometimes ceremonial items. Occasionally we see stylistic variations within the same burial mound, whether in the position, orientation or type of object. These differences were apparently justified by ancient ideas about the social status and upbringing of the deceased. Scythian nomad graves contained goods such as weapons, containers filled with food, jewelry, and horses that were fully equipped and lavishly dressed for their long journey. Objects buried with men and women of different social standing probably varied according to the role they played in the community. However, it is not uncommon to find weapons in the graves of females from the Eurasian nomadic cultures: thus there were pieces of armour and an arrowhead in the seventh-century BC burial of a young woman and horse in mound 19 at Kelermes in the northern Caucasus.

Burial mounds are normally found in groups rather than singly as they often served several generations of the same tribe. The location and orientation of these typically followed a prescribed pattern involving the order of their construction and the status of the buried individuals. A unique structure can be observed

in one of the earliest Scythian burial mounds at Arzhan-1 in Tuva, as described in Chapter 3. It is not uncommon for burial mounds to provide a resting place for an entire family. Elite burial mounds stand out because of their greater size and structural complexity, and family or clan connections allow us to distinguish smaller burial groups within larger burial mounds. Many were arranged in long lines, and were sometimes surrounded by ditches (fig. 152). Finds at and around royal Scythian burial mounds led archaeologists to reassess their idea of these as more than just a structure made for a single funerary event. A royal burial mound was doubtless created to serve as a funerary memorial complex intended for regular and lengthy ritual attendance, beginning during the funeral and the accompanying funerary feasting and continuing to memorial rituals a year or more afterwards.

The nomads buried their kings and warriors with one or more horses. These were a key means of transport in life as well as in the afterlife and were there to take their owners on their last journey (fig. 153). The horses were slain specifically as part of an elaborate funerary ritual. The number of horses found in a single grave would sometimes reach several

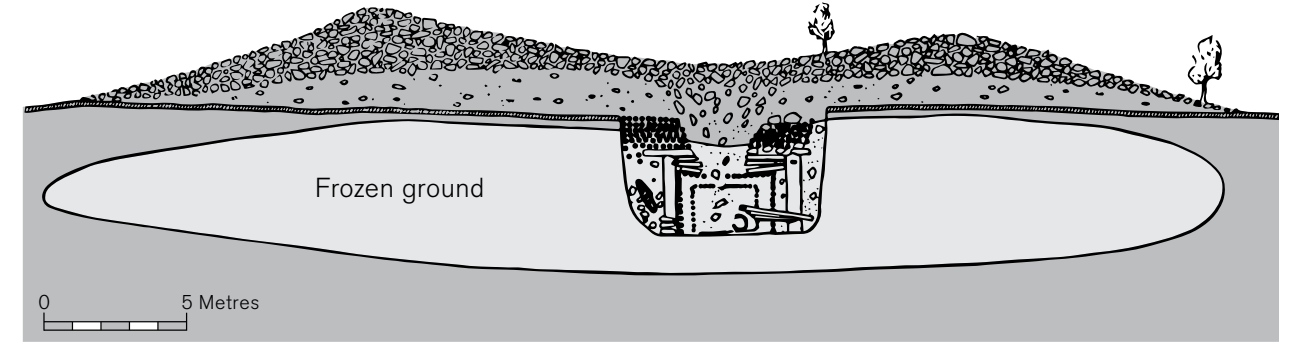


Fig. 149  
Section through burial mound 5  
at Pazyryk showing the log-cabin  
chamber at the foot of the burial pit  
capped by a stone mound that  
prevented the ground below from  
defrosting.

Fig. 150  
Log tomb chamber from burial  
mound 5 at Pazyryk. H. approx. 160,  
L. 660, W. 310 cm.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1687/283



Fig. 151  
Section through external part of  
burial pit of mound 5 at Pazyryk  
showing the relative position of the  
piled-up horses, cart and large felt  
hanging.

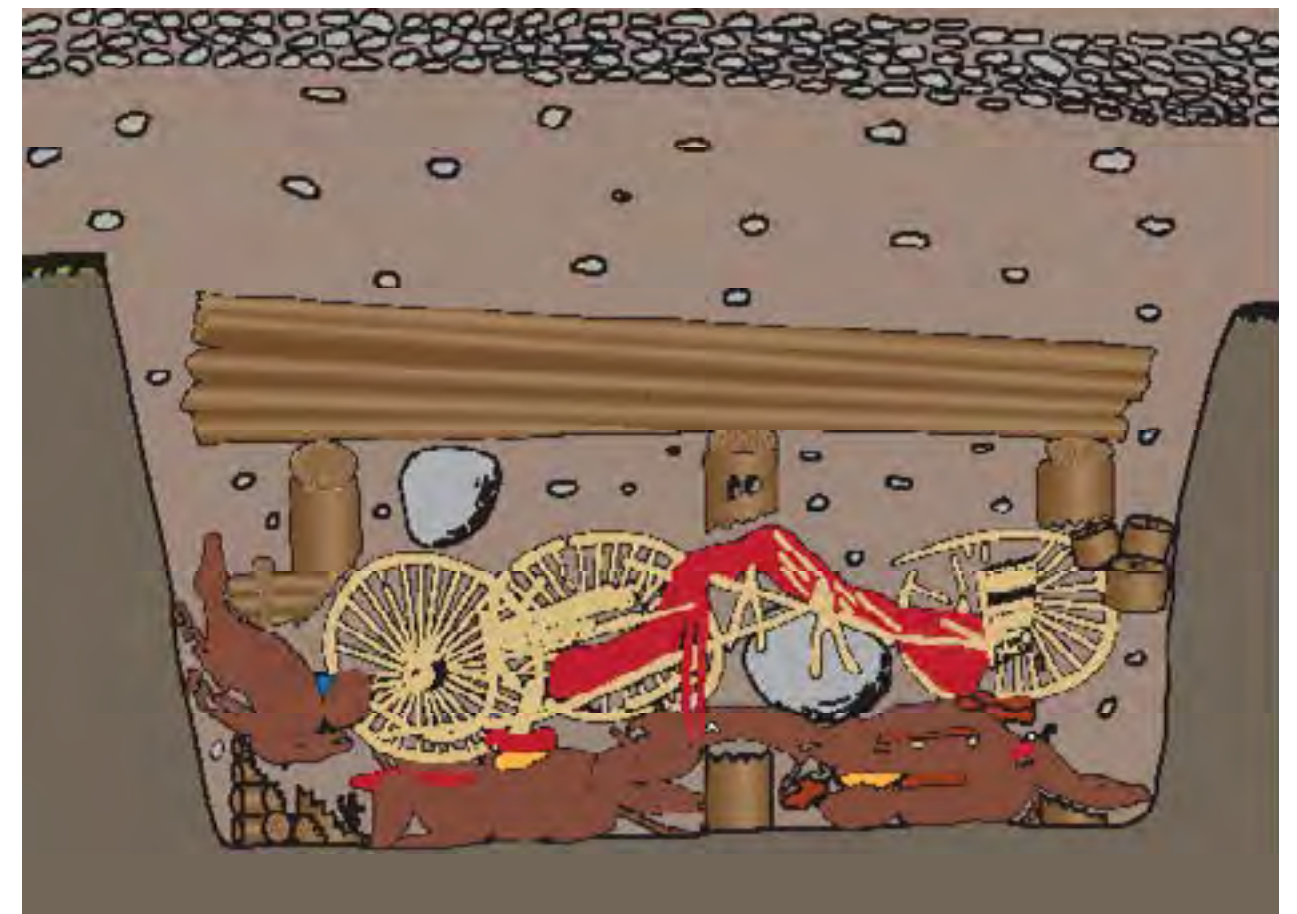






Fig. 152  
Aerial photograph showing an alignment of burial mounds at Chinge-Tei, Tuva, southern Siberia.

Fig. 153  
Multiple horse burial at Arzhan-2.

dozen. Some hierarchical distinction is observed even in the horse burials: among the exceptionally well-preserved organic materials dating to the fifth to third centuries BC at the Altai burial mounds at Bashadar, Tuekta, Pazyryk, Berel and elsewhere, there were not only horses bridled for the long road, but others that were elaborately decorated and wearing deer or ibex-horned masks (cat. 152). These were clearly the oldest and favourite mounts of the deceased.

A horse was an essential companion for noble nomad warrior burials. Its main purpose was presumably as the intermediary between life and afterlife: in fairy tales we often hear of horses carrying the hero to the magical kingdom, and in the funerary context it carries its master to the kingdom of the dead.<sup>14</sup> In some cultures, only the head, skin and legs of the horse would be buried, and in these cases we can assume that a horse effigy had been made. Returning to the Ossetian epic, *Tales of the Narts*, we see that Shoshlan, the living hero of this Nart, travels to the land of the dead in order to consult his deceased wife. On leaving, he gave away the secret of his death to Shirdon, explaining that death can only come to him through his knees, while his loyal steed Bzou

could only be killed through his hooves. Shirdon then orders archers from the underworld to shoot arrows upwards at Bzou's hooves, killing the horse. Before he takes his final breath, Bzou tells Shoshlan to 'quickly but carefully skin me, and stuff the hide with straw. Afterward sit on my stuffed image, and who knows, perhaps I may carry you as far as your home again!' When Shoshlan was later killed by what was referred to as the Divine Wheel of Balshag, which cut off his legs at the knee, he went looking for his horse to take him to the Kingdom of the Dead. Shirdon told him to pick the best horse from his stables, slay it and hollow out its carcass. This story underlines again the perceived need for a dead horse to transport a dead man to the 'other world'.<sup>15</sup>

The burial mounds represent the most important source of archaeological evidence for reconstructing life among the nomadic cultures of the Scythian period and allow us to visualize their idea of the world based on their material culture and funerary rituals. The design and structure of the mounds vary according to their location. The burial mounds of noble warriors during the Scythian period often reached enormous sizes. Chertomlyk is the largest burial mound in the

Fig. 154  
Gilt silver amphora from the Chertomlyk burial mound. H. 70 cm. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Dn 1863 1/166



northern Black Sea littoral and measures about 20 m high and 100 m across. Underneath the mound is a deep pit with four chambers, one of which used to be connected to a spacious room that served as the king's tomb. Eleven horses were interred in three adjacent pits, two of them accompanied by 'grooms'.

Despite widespread looting, the treasure of the Scythian kings has become the stuff of legend. Due to the use of secret storage chambers, some of this treasure has survived. Next to the king's tomb was a lavish female grave belonging to the queen or the king's concubine. She wore a tall headdress stitched with square gold pendants showing a religious scene of a goddess sitting on a throne and holding a mirror, with a man standing holding a wine-pourer (*rhyton*) in front of her. The woman's wrists were adorned with gold bracelets, and a beaded necklace and a gold neck ring with images of lions on either side were placed around her neck. A bronze mirror with a bone handle had been placed by her right hand. A large decorated silver dish and a wine ladle with a wolf's head on its handle, as well as a unique Greek masterpiece, a gilt silver amphora (fig. 154), were placed next to the painted sarcophagus containing

the dead woman's body. The silver amphora may have served as a sacred wine vessel when gods were worshipped in divine rituals. The theme reflected in its imagery is that of sacrifice, and ultimately of life and death.

Herodotus speaks of gold in connection with the legendary genealogy of the first Scythian kings: 'there fell down from the sky into Scythia certain implements, all of gold, namely, a plough, a yoke, a sword, and a flask'.<sup>16</sup> This refers to how the sacrifice of gold objects was considered important, as the Scythians viewed it as a symbol of power, and why gold cups were a necessary part of royal burial.<sup>17</sup> The abundance of gold, silver and other precious metal finds has various meanings; they are often connected with the sun and moon, with gold most likely being associated with the sun. Working with Indo-European fairy tales and mystical texts, one modern author concluded that gold must represent an aspect of belonging to the 'other world'.<sup>18</sup> This world takes on the guise of a 'magical kingdom' lying somewhere far beyond valleys, seas and woods: in order to reach it one has to overcome many difficulties and trials, but this is where the hero will find his sweetheart. He will only obtain her after solving the trickiest problems and proving himself through heroic deeds. 'Gold here features so often, so vividly and in such a variety of forms, that one can be certain in calling the magical kingdom the gold kingdom.'<sup>19</sup>

The Dnieper region is where the largest and richest Scythian burial mounds of the late fifth to fourth century BC are found: the Solokha, Chertomlyk, Gaimanova Mogila, Oguz, Tolstaya Mogila, Alexandropol, Melitopol and numerous other burial mounds have produced the most extraordinary and carefully made artefacts. It is possible that this was also the home of the legendary Gerrhi, the area where, according to Herodotus, Scythians would bury their kings, but it is possible that it was an entirely fictional construct, similar to the Valhalla of Norse mythology, which was a land of fallen heroes rather than an actual territory.

According to Herodotus, a brutal ritual would take place at the royal graveside a year after burial:

Taking the trustiest of the rest of the king's servants (and these are native-born Scythians, for only those



serve the king whom he bids so to do, and none of the Scythians have servants bought by money) they strangle fifty of these squires and fifty of their best horses and empty and cleanse the bellies of all, fill them with chaff, and sew them up again. Then they make fast the half of a wheel to two posts, the hollow upwards, and the other half to another pair of posts, till many posts thus furnished are planted in the ground, and, presently, driving thick stakes lengthways through the horses' bodies to their necks, they lay the horses aloft on the wheels so that the wheel in front supports the horses' shoulders and the wheel behind takes the weight of the belly by the hindquarters, and the forelegs and hind legs hang free; and putting bridles and bits in the horses' mouths they stretch the bridles to the front and make them fast with pegs. Then they take each one of the fifty strangled young men and mount him on a horse; their way of doing it is to drive an upright stake through each body passing up by the spine to the neck, and enough of the stake projects below to be fixed in a hole made in the other stake, that which passes through the horse. So having set horsemen of this fashion round about the tomb they ride away.<sup>20</sup>

There is no archaeological proof of such a practice, yet skeletons of horses found at several levels in the Kelermes burial mounds may be evidence for rituals involving the burial of newly slain horses some time after the original funeral, thus giving credibility to Herodotus.<sup>21</sup> As noted above, according to Herodotus the Scythians would 'cut off a part of their ears, shave their heads, make cuts round their arms, tear their foreheads and noses, and pierce their left hands with arrows'.<sup>22</sup> In a similar manner the Ossetians would cut off the tips of their horses' ears, the widow would cut her hair, and the women would scratch their faces and arms with arrows. The Ossetian custom of 'sitting up the dead', whereby an effigy of the deceased is mourned for a second time and treated to a feast, may be seen as an echo of the Scythian practice of creating a 'corpse guard' out of the fifty slain men.<sup>23</sup> Dumézil stresses that:

Scythian funerary customs, as described by Herodotus, imply a wider understanding of the afterlife, reaching far beyond the burial mound:

it is hard to imagine what use the fifty ghost riders would be to the dead king in the narrow remits of the immediate burial mound area, especially since they were not killed at the time of his death.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the most important consideration relating to ancient cultures' understanding of the life–death cycle is proposed by V. Propp: 'Birth is the return to life of one who is dead, often an ancestor.'<sup>25</sup> This turns the afterlife into a potential source of renewed life, and in this particular context it may be useful to reconsider the concept of sacrifice, the purpose of which can be defined as an offering of some value presented by the world of the living to the world of the dead. The appreciation of this offering is expressed in the continuing life or well-being of a particular individual or of the community as a whole. In a ritualistic sacrifice of a human or animal, death becomes a token of the renewal of life and feeds into a system that links the concepts of sacrifice, offering and treasure.

Golden hides or magical objects made of gold feature in many ancient mythologies. Propp stressed this persistent symbolism in myths and fairy tales: 'all that has some relation to the magical kingdom, could be described as being golden'; conversely, 'anything that carries a golden hue, thus betrays its relation to the other world'.<sup>26</sup> The same author refers to the magical kingdom as a 'gold kingdom', and sees the colour of gold as a 'marker of otherworldliness'. Bringing religious offerings of precious treasure or creating secret storage chambers as part of the elite burials may have been carried out in a similar spirit. As the offering or sacrifice is passed on, it returns as life, wealth and progeny, and ultimately represents well-being. The personal responsibility for well-being and the continuous propagation of the clan community organization lay with the 'king' who performed certain shamanic functions, as well as embodying the genealogical link with the ancestors and the gods. The hero-king represented the incarnation of the life force and the unity of the tribe and the realm,<sup>27</sup> his image a symbol of the goodwill of the gods, represented in ancient Iranian belief as 'divine fortune' (*xvarnah*).<sup>28</sup>

The idea of sacrifice has to be considered in the same context, as it is closely linked with ideas of consumption and ingestion. One scholar noted that

'The pre-class society saw food and sacrifice as something ... intrinsically connected with the concepts of life and death.'<sup>29</sup> In order to ensure 'rebirth' and the steady growth of progeny, one needs to sacrifice 'to feed the ancestors'. Sacrifice as the prerequisite for well-being and continuity is also understood in the more general terms of protection, hence the popularity of sacrificial imagery in Scythian art with scenes of animal contest, hunting, feasting and combat.

Within myths and fairy tales, often the hero meets an underworld creature during his travels, and the boundary of the two worlds is marked by a feature such as a river, sea, lake, crossroads or ditch, over the other side of which the 'other world' begins.<sup>30</sup> The entrance to this is normally guarded: the hero must overcome hurdles and solve difficult riddles to prove his right of access, show his sacral knowledge and essentially pass the 'friend or foe' test. Crossing the border is always fraught, but 'he who knows the path of life' knows 'the secret of birth', 'the exit-path', 'the path of immortality'.<sup>31</sup> The border with the realm of the dead is where the hero combats mythical creatures representing this other world. The 'Kalinov Bridge', where the hero of Russian fairy tales battles the Gorynych or Slavic Dragon, is nothing other than a passage into the netherworld, where the dragon is the guardian of the entrance and the battle that takes place on the cusp of the two worlds is seen as the 'deadly battle'. Once the battle is won and the hero enters the world of the dead, his nemesis often becomes his helper and guide. The entrance guardian is also the devourer, and in some cases the hero must pass through his jaws to end up in the world of the dead.<sup>32</sup> Occasionally the passage into the other world is emphasized by passage through the body of the underworld beast.

These notions have very deep roots, which were already obsolete by Scythian times, yet they undoubtedly persisted as an undercurrent as they form such a powerful part of 'Animal Style' art. The opening of the 'entrance–exit' ('the gates of life') 'is explained in the archaic ideas of the devouring of the deceased by a beast, and the passage of the deceased into its mouth and belly'.<sup>33</sup> This archaic world view represents a set of deep ideas whereby the connection between a person and the world around them is enacted through the intermediary function of

the animal, and the opposition of life and death is crucial. The passage from the world of the living into the 'other world' also implies a rigorous 'friend–foe' test. Having passed an initiation by travelling to and from the other world, and gained the wisdom and strength of their ancestors, young men return to their communities with an enhanced status. The hero will seek a bride in the other world, and most often she will have shape-shifting abilities, turning herself into a swan, a frog or other animal. Thus marriage belongs to the margin between the earthly and the other world. This is evidenced in a great number of customs that link matrimonial and funerary symbolism.

Without some otherworldly involvement there can be no childbirth. The sacrifice, represented in the killing of either a totemic or (with the decline of totemism) sacred animal is necessary for the renewal of the clan, and for that one needs the help of a blood-brother beast. This is the backdrop against which we might view the subject of hunting in myths and in ancient art. Success in the hunt was a way of commemorating the life and glory of the victor, whereas failure was equivalent to death and conveyed an otherworldly conspiracy. Hunting was a symbolic equal of sacrifice. The slaughtered animal was a sacrifice that had been accepted by the other world, and the hunt itself was proof of the courage of the initiated and a sign of the goodwill of divine powers. The same goes for single combat. This may explain the frequency with which we see funerary symbolism in combat scenes. The king represents an intermediary between his people and the higher power, including the ancestors.

This idea is relevant for the consideration of ancient artistic imagery, which includes feasts, hunting, battle and marriage. It is possible that in some cases gold ornaments worn by the nomadic kings were made specifically for a funeral and not worn in life (see also cat. 34). This suggestion is based on the examples in Peter the Great's Siberian Collection of belt plaques, with zoomorphic images, that lack any practical fasteners or other means of attaching them to the belt. Most of the jewelry in the collection is done in the so-called 'Animal Style', and has scenes of combat and animal contest that can be interpreted as representations of sacrifice. Some bracelet and torc terminals show predators swallowing their prey (see cat. 20). Part of the costume is made up of ornaments

that also carry a stark symbolic meaning, indicating the gender, age, and social and ethnic status of their wearers. They directly mirror the spiritual life of the particular people and express their aesthetic, religious and ideological beliefs.

The shape and design of the headdress was of particular symbolic significance and, just like the zoomorphic decoration of the bracelets and neck rings, carried an apotropaic (protective) function. The ornaments, whether belts, necklaces, bracelets or neck rings, are all circular or spiral shapes and symbolize a protective ‘ring’. The concept of the magic circle is relevant for a vast number of archaic cultures, and is reflected not just in jewelry but also in traditional embroidery and other types of costume decoration. These are the function and content of the ornaments of the Eurasian nomads of the Scythian period (cats 20–21, 27). A notable feature of the Scytho-Siberian ‘Animal Style’ is the presence in its bestiary of monsters that combine the features of various real-life fauna. Predators, especially fantastic monsters, represent the underworld.

Only burial mounds of the highest status contain gold jewelry with both ‘Animal Style’ and anthropomorphic designs. These carry a religious meaning, reflecting the interconnection between the earthly realm and the ‘other world’. Plaques with scenes of a boar hunt (cat. 22) or the ‘under-the-tree scene’ belong to this category (cat. 15).<sup>34</sup> The sprawling man on the latter represents a corpse, not a sleeping man, and the sitting figure must be this hero’s ‘proxy’ and guide, a character that often appears in myths and rituals. The religious character of this scene is clear, and it depicts a major subject of ancient art: life and death.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps too the female deity, the spirit of earth and vegetation – the tree in the image is an allusion to ‘the tree of life’ – is the embodiment of the ‘Great Mother’ who gives life but is also associated with underworld forces and the dead. We know that in archaic communities rituals that accompany marriage and death were closely connected, and the significance of the quiver was cited by Herodotus in connection with Scythian marriage customs.<sup>36</sup> The tree scene is apparently related to a mythical story in which the hero’s death is connected to his sacred marriage to the Great Mother goddess. This kind of sacred marriage was seen as a token of renewal of life and the fulfilment

of the full natural cycle – the endless passing and rebirth of all that is alive on earth.

In addition to the belt plaques, another example of the sacred marriage theme in the artistic tradition is found at sites linked with the funerary cult: a Bosporan relief from the Trehbratny burial mound (fourth to third centuries BC);<sup>37</sup> the late Hellenistic design of the Kerch tomb of Anfestery, which was dated by M. Rostovtzeff to the late first century BC or beginning of the first century AD;<sup>38</sup> the image on the felt hanging from the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk, which dates to the third century BC (see fig. 110); and high-value objects such as the third- to second-century BC *rhyton* from Merdzhany in Kuban (fig. 155).<sup>39</sup> In the imagery on each of these there is a pattern of repeating motifs that represents a key for interpretation and a specific iconographic stereotype. The main elements in all these images are: a seated female figure (in the Siberian artefacts, on the headdress), who is clearly a goddess and whose organic and sacral connection with the tree is often highlighted by the fact that her hair and headdress are interwoven with the tree branches, or in branches growing out of the throne she sits on (as on the Pazyryk rug); a tree of life with the hanging quiver (the Pazyryk hanging shows the quiver still on the horseman’s shoulder); a male character or horseman (on the Siberian gold plaque, a man lying on the ground; his saddled horse, tied nearby, allows us to identify him as a horseman – see cat. 15); and one or more horses, always saddled and bridled.

In some scenes the goddess may hold a small vessel in her hands and this must be intended for the horseman, who would need to drink its contents to pass into the ‘other world’. The horses certainly belong to the horseman, even when he is shown walking. The narrative scenes on the Trehbratny relief may be one of the earliest such depictions, and the horseman facing the goddess is standing at the border of the ‘other world’. The trunk or tree represents the division of the two and ‘symbolizes the limit of the real world, which the horseman is about to breach’.<sup>40</sup> The quiver’s suspension from the tree hints at marriage between the hero and the goddess, while the shape of the goddess’s headdress on the ‘under-the-tree scene’ on the belt plaque reaffirms this, as it is that of a bride.<sup>41</sup>

This suggested reconstruction of the ritual context behind the funerary ritual and grave goods from sites

Fig. 155  
Fragment of a gold *rhyton* from  
a burial mound near the village  
of Merdzhany, Krasnodar region.  
H. 13.2 cm. Third to second century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 2521/10

such as Pazyryk points to a complex interwoven ideology. There are close links between artistic motifs and iconographic details across many different nomadic sites, and they embody ideas of death and the ‘other world’, and the cult of the Great Goddess who embodies the life force of nature and the promise of rebirth.







181–183

### Coffin with a lid and openwork appliqués representing two cockerels as coffin decoration

This coffin and its lid were carved from the lower sections of thick larch trunks. The large holes at the ends held the ropes with which the coffin was lowered into the tomb. The surface has been carefully trimmed. The ends are up to 25 cm thick, the bottom is 9 to 11 cm thick and the side walls are as thin as 1.5 to 3 cm. The lid was attached to the coffin with large bronze nails, which in this case were removed by the grave robbers; less frequently wooden pegs or nails were used instead (cat. 186). Sometimes the nail heads were covered with representations of eagles, and examples of these were found in burial mounds 1 and 11 at Berel (cat. 221).<sup>42</sup> Such coffins were invariably placed by the southern wall of the burial chamber but all are different. The coffins of 'chieftains' were 3.25 to 5 m long; those of 'noblemen', 2.5 to 3 m. Commoners, rather than being buried in coffins, were laid on planks. Children could be interred in very small coffins measuring between 1 and 1.3 m in length and without a tomb chamber. A wooden plug on one end of the Pazyryk burial mound 1 coffin probably replaced a cut-out knot in the wood, and similar plugs are found in various spots on other coffins. A crack in the lid, probably formed while the

wood was being worked, was stitched with a leather lace that was passed through specially drilled holes. The outside of the coffin was covered with 4-cm-wide birch-bark strips from a young tree, pasted diagonally in two overlapping layers.<sup>43</sup> The hexapods used for smoking hemp were covered in a similar manner with cherry bark (cat. 93). Chieftains' coffins were often decorated with carving or with leather and birch-bark appliqués. The side walls of the present one carried fourteen openwork leather pieces covered with tin leaf, depicting standing or fighting pairs of cockerels. The excavator found these ornaments in a semi-decomposed state, but their original appearance can be reconstructed (fig. 156).

Images of cockerels first appear in Pazyryk monuments about 300 BC and gradually start replacing the eagles previously popular in 'Animal Style' decorative art, for instance as terminals of larger animals' horns and on mane covers (cat. 170). While there is no evidence that they were domesticated in the region, hens and gamecocks were known at the time in northern China. Cockerels feature on Pazyryk clothing, vessels, headgear, tack and tattoos, but usually only their heads or combs are depicted. It appears that cockerels and eagles shared the same symbolic significance: the bird on a mirror handle from burial mound 36 at Berel combines the features of both.<sup>44</sup> **EVS**

Wood, leather  
L. 371, W. 65–78, H. 58–60 cm (coffin); L. 371, W. 54–61, H. 25–27 cm (lid); L. 18.5, W. 12; L. 15.5 cm (appliqués)  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/37a, b; 1295/39; 1295/50

Fig. 156  
Reconstruction by E. Stepanova of the original appearance of a coffin decorated with cutouts.



184

Appliqué representing an elk: coffin decoration

This is one of thirteen appliqués that decorated the coffin in burial mound 2 at Pazyryk. Like the cockerels from mound 1 at Pazyryk, they were attached to the wood with small iron nails, with the leather's flesh side facing outwards. Perhaps the appliqués were also covered with tin foil that no longer survives.<sup>46</sup> The animals have elk bodies and the antlers of elk or deer. Similarly shaped appliqués are known from women's burials in mound 2 at Tuekta, mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 and perhaps mound 2 at Bashadar.<sup>46</sup> **EVS**

Leather  
L. 30, W. 27 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/283



185

Fragment of a ladder

Ladders were needed because Scythian burial pits were deep. Those in the large Pazyryk burial mounds reached 4 to 5 m below ground level; the one at mound 1 at Tuekta, as much as 8 m. A ladder from that burial mound had rectangular rungs inserted into two massive uprights, each 8 by 10 cm thick.<sup>47</sup> More often, ladders were made of unshaped tree trunks, with branch stubs or deep notches serving as steps. The two notched ladders from mounds 4 and 5 at Pazyryk were, respectively, 317 cm and 413 cm high; their thickness ranged from 9 to 11 cm on top to 14 to 16 cm at the base.<sup>48</sup> Most of the wood has decomposed and generally only fragments survive. **EVS**

Wood  
L. 139 cm  
Third century BC  
Burial mound 5, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1686/340



186

Copper nail and two wooden pegs

Felt covers and hangings (cat. 189) were nailed to the walls of burial chambers. Commoners' burial chambers were also covered with felt;<sup>49</sup> perhaps the walls of houses were insulated in a similar manner. Wooden pegs were inserted in the chinks between logs. In burial mound 2 at Pazyryk, holes and offsets from the bronze nails' round heads are preserved in the black felt. Metal nails were also used for ornamenting and securing the lids of wooden coffins. Unlike those of wood, these were often removed by tomb robbers who would sometimes just cut off the heads and leave the remainder *in situ*, so relatively few complete examples survive. Nails were cast in single-part clay moulds and sharpened by cold hammering.<sup>50</sup> X-ray fluorescence



analysis shows that the nail from mound 2 at Pazyryk was made of copper, alloyed with 5% arsenic, 1–2% antimony and less than 0.2% silver. This chemical composition is typical of Pazyryk bronzes. The alloy was obtained by melting local copper ores, which contain a natural mixture of arsenic and antimony, and sometimes adding minimal tin: at Pazyryk, this metal was used for making tin foil as a substitute for silver decoration. **EVS**

Copper alloy, wood  
L. 11.5, 20.7, 10.8 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/6; 1684/15; 1684/17



187

Mallet

As a rule, all the tools used for building a burial mound – mallets, stakes, bone mattocks, ladders, woodworking instruments, carts for transporting timber and stone – were deposited in the burial pit or in the mound above as it was constructed. Mallets were probably used for driving stakes into the hard ground to break it up before shovelling. Their working ends are often cracked from use.<sup>51</sup> **EVS**

Wood  
L. 58 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/533



A piece of birch bark from the ceiling of a log house

The log-cabin-like burial chambers of the Pazyryk mounds were usually covered with four or five layers of birch bark. In burial mounds 3 and 5, broad strips of birch bark, 40 to 70 cm wide, were stitched together with bast (woody fibre) ropes into large sheets. The two superimposed sheets at mound 5 measured 5.2 by 8.2 m. Their ends hung down from the burial chamber's roof, covering about half of the walls.<sup>52</sup> The birch-bark covering was waterproof, but cold air could still penetrate the burial chambers, so that the moisture trapped inside them condensed and froze. Once a burial mound had been robbed, water could seep in from the outside. In the same burial mounds, larch bark and branches of *Pentaphylloides fruticosa* were placed over the birch bark, forming a top layer that measured from 10 cm (Pazyryk mounds 1, 2 and 3) to as much as 1 m (Bashadar mound 2) in thickness. The branches were cut while the *P. fruticosa* plant was in bloom, between June and October. In ordinary burial mounds they were spread under the corpses or

used as stuffing for leather pillows,<sup>53</sup> while the chambers were covered with large strips of larch rather than birch bark. The Russian ethnographer S. Vainshtein described how Siberian herders in the Tuva region used to make small cups, pails and other containers from birch bark:

The bark was peeled from young trees and turned inside out on the spot, ready for boiling. Several pieces of the bark were wrapped round bunches of grass with one piece of birch on top of the other and the bundles were tied with three narrow strips of willow bark, *khaak karty*. They were then put into the cauldron with a lid of turf, the grassy side downwards, with stones on top. The cauldron was set up over the hearth which was laid close to the *chum*, or wigwam. Boiling continued for two or three days, after which the rolls were removed and unfurled. Then each piece of bark was unrolled separately and kept until roofing commenced. A roof-covering for a *chum* required between twenty-one and thirty-three pieces of birch bark.<sup>54</sup> **EVS**

Birch bark  
L. 55, W. 42 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684D/3



Rug with a decorated border: lions' heads and triangles

The floor and walls of the great burial chambers at Pazyryk were covered with large pieces of dark felt and decorated with rugs or strips of white felt with coloured appliqué. These fragments come from the covering and decorative frieze in burial mound 1 and consist of a strip of dark-grey felt about 63 cm across, with a 39-cm-wide felt border sewn on and having three bands. The upper and lower bands are composed of alternating triangles sewn with twisted sinew, while the middle band is white and decorated with alternating red and blue thin felt cutouts of roaring lions' heads seen in profile. Similar lions' heads are also found on a bridle from Pazyryk mound 2,<sup>55</sup> a felt covering from Pazyryk mound 1 and birch-bark costume ornaments from burial mound 3 at Ulandryk-IV.<sup>56</sup> Lions were not part of the local megafauna: this design is based on an Achaemenid one, and the roaring lion-griffin motif, unnaturally long ears and curled manes resemble Achaemenid works of the late sixth to fourth centuries BC (fig. 157). Scythian lion images from

other regions, for example from Kazakhstan and the Black Sea coast,<sup>57</sup> are derived from similar Iranian sources. The geometric border ornament on the Pazyryk felt strip also has parallels from Achaemenid Susa. The route of transmission may have been through seeing textiles decorated with metal appliqué, as gold appliqué of this type are known (fig. 158). However, in the present case the design has been slightly adapted, as the muzzles and teeth almost resemble wolves'.<sup>58</sup> A thick dark-grey cord made of four twisted threads was sewn along the upper edge. **EVS, SUS**


Felt  
L. 135, W. 100 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Burial mound 1, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1295/52



Fig. 157  
Achaemenid glazed brick from the east side of the Apadana at Susa, south-west Iran (excavations by R. de Mecquenem, 1914). Late sixth to fifth century BC. H. 36, W. 31 cm.  
Musée du Louvre, Sb 3336

Fig. 158  
Achaemenid gold lion appliqué. H. 5.1, W. 6 cm.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 56.154.2  
Gift of Khalil Rabenou, 1956





A. Yu. Alexeyev, E. F. Korolkova,  
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## **8 The Scythians and their cultural contacts**



# The Scythians and their cultural contacts

A. Yu. Alexeyev, E. F. Korolkova, T. V. Rjabkova & E. V. Stepanova

But as regards foreign usages, the Scythians (as others) are wondrous loth to practise those of any other country, and particularly of Hellas.<sup>1</sup>

The interaction of nomadic and sedentary societies is a major feature of human history. Nomads adopted certain features of sedentary culture and, being mobile, were able to transfer these far beyond their point of origin. This applies equally to the Scythians, whose material culture contains a number of foreign elements (fig. 159). Herodotus’ belief that the Scythians came to eastern Europe from Asia, quoted in Chapter 1, is confirmed by several classes of Scythian artefacts, including anthropomorphic statues, cauldrons, circular mirrors, horse gear and stone dishes, which find parallels among finds from Central Asia.<sup>2</sup> Thus the so-called ‘Kuban type’ of Scythian helmets evidently originated in northern China at the time of the Western Zhou dynasty (cat. 148).<sup>3</sup> The openwork terminals common in Scythian burials (cats 177–80) also have a Chinese origin. They were used in funerary rites and were probably attached to horses or carts.<sup>4</sup> Those excavated by N. I. Veselovsky (1848–1918) in mound 2 at Kelermes, the earliest of the mounds at this important site in the north-west Caucasus, resemble globular bells and have a diamond-shaped symbol on the top from the wax models from which the terminals were cast. This symbol must have had some significance and occurs on earlier artefacts from the Okunevo culture of the middle Siberian Bronze Age, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, while the shape of the bells is paralleled by finds from Shaanxi that date to the Western Zhou period. In China such objects continued into the Warring States period (475–221 bc), but in the Kuban region they were replaced, after the early Scythian period, by functionally similar examples of different shapes (cats 179–80).<sup>5</sup>

Scythian and Cimmerian invasions of the Near East are occasionally recorded in Late Assyrian and ancient Greek sources, and the effects are perhaps illustrated by objects found in Scythian burials. Detailed study of these artefacts shows that they all date from the late eighth and first half of the seventh centuries bc.<sup>6</sup> Since many reflect typically nomadic tastes, they must have been specially manufactured for Scythian patrons by Near Eastern craftsmen rather than simply brought back as war booty. For example, in 1903 in mound 1 at Kelermes, D. G. Schultz excavated a short sword with a butterfly-shaped guard and a splendid golden scabbard, belonging to a type known in Greek as an *akinakes* (cat. 139). The decoration on the scabbard combines Scythian motifs of a crouching deer and bird’s heads with bulging eyes with ancient Near Eastern imagery of *lamassu* monsters (Assyrian protective deities with the bodies of a bull or lion, human heads and wings) and a ‘tree of life’ flanked by winged guardian figures. Some of the non-Scythian elements were evidently derived from Urartian art,<sup>7</sup> perhaps during the reign of Rusa II (680–639 bc),<sup>8</sup> but other details are executed in the distinctive style of the Luristan region of western Iran.<sup>9</sup> If, as most scholars now assume, the scabbard was manufactured at the Scythian royal camp during a southern campaign,<sup>10</sup> this must have been somewhere in north-west Iran.

Scythian burial mounds north of the Caucasus and along the Dnieper river have also yielded jewelry, ritual vessels and furniture decoration of ancient Near Eastern origin. The gold covering of a wooden vessel found in a destroyed burial mound at Tuskaya in the Republic of Adygea provides one example (cat. 106). Such vessels were probably intended for ritual use and are common among Scythian finds.<sup>11</sup> This example was decorated with a winged human figure holding lions: similar images occur in Hittite art,<sup>12</sup> but the



Fig. 159  
Map of Eurasia showing the extent of the Achaemenid empire (in red) and the Eurasian steppe and mixed woodland largely occupied by the Scythians indicated in light green.  
Drawing by Paul Goodhead

figure’s distinctive large-nosed profile, hairstyle, flexed knees and dress find parallels in the monuments of Carchemish in northern Syria and on some Luristan bronzes.<sup>13</sup> However, winged human figures are rare in Luristan<sup>14</sup> and much more common in eastern Greek artefacts. The winged deities depicted on a drinking horn and on a mirror from the Kelermes burial mounds resemble the Tuskaya example and must also be contemporary with the orientaling phase of ancient Greek art.<sup>15</sup>

Contacts between Scythians and Greeks began during the seventh century bc, first during the course of Scythian invasions of Anatolia, then through the founding of Greek colonies on the north coast of the Black Sea. The first of these colonies was established in the seventh century, one on Berezan island in the Bug estuary and another close to modern Taganrog on the Sea of Azov. These resulted in an influx of Greek imports, including pottery and bronze vessels,

jewelry and wine-filled pottery amphorae. It is unclear whether relations were always peaceful, and some scholars think that Greek objects, especially pottery, may have been looted by the Scythians from Greek settlements rather than obtained through trade. However, over the course of time foreign culture influenced these ‘barbarians’ to such a degree that the Scythian king Scyles, for example, ‘was in no way content with the Scythian way of life, and was much more inclined to Greek ways’.<sup>16</sup>

Fifth- and fourth-century bc classical Greek craftsmen supplied the Scythian nobility and royalty with luxury items, and some of these ended up in tombs (cats 206–208). Scholars tend to think that most of these objects were manufactured in the Bosporean Kingdom and primarily its capital city of Panticapaeum. In some cases the Greek goldsmiths, evidently prompted by their patrons, adopted a Scythian ‘Animal Style’ or depicted scenes from Scythian mythology (cat. 205). A novelty



Fig. 160  
Gold scabbard overlay with an iron  
short sword with gold hilt. L. 54.4 cm.  
350–325 BC. Chertomlyk burial  
mound, Dnieper region.  
State Hermitage Museum, St  
Petersburg, Dn 1863 1/447

introduced by them was human imagery, otherwise uncommon in nomadic art (cat. 88). This must have corresponded to some anthropomorphic notions in Scythian religion. The Scythians evidently conceived of their own gods in human form, so that Herodotus could identify these with certain Greek deities:

The only gods whom they propitiate by worship are these: Hestia in especial, and secondly Zeus and Earth, whom they deem to be the wife of Zeus; after these, Apollo, and the Heavenly Aphrodite, and Heracles, and Ares. All the Scythians worship these as gods; the Scythians called Royal sacrifice also to Poseidon. In the Scythian tongue Hestia is called Tabiti; Zeus (in my judgment most rightly so called) Papaeus; Earth is Api, Apollo Goetosyrus, the Heavenly Aphrodite Argimpasa, and Poseidon Thagimasadas. It is their practice to make images and altars and shrines for Ares, but for no other god.<sup>17</sup>

Most anthropomorphic compositions, like those on the Solokha silver bowl (cat. 207) or the gilt silver amphora from Chertomlyk (fig. 154), were based on Scythian themes. Particularly noteworthy are the demonstrably accurate depictions of Scythian dress, arms and armour on objects from Kul’ Oba and the third of the burial mounds at Chastye Kurgany near Voronezh. One of these could perhaps illustrate a legend reported by Herodotus about the origins of kingship among the Scythians.<sup>18</sup> Images of purely Greek mythological figures occur less often and, as a rule, on Scythian-type objects, such as a sword sheath (fig. 160) and *gorytos* quiver plaques from Chertomlyk. It is possible that the Scythians assimilated Greek myths to their own religious ideas, so that, for example, Achilles became a counterpart to Colaxais.<sup>19</sup>

Under the influence of the Hellenistic states founded in the wake of Alexander the Great, the Pazyryk culture, located on the eastern periphery of the Scythian world, also adopted anthropomorphic imagery in the late fourth and the third centuries BC. Such imagery travelled as far as southern Siberia (cat. 15), while Greek-inspired sphinxes, centaurs and winged horses appeared even in China. Since the Eurasian nomads inhabited a vast region that bordered several major centres of civilization (China, Iran, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Greece), the Scythian ‘Animal Style’ did not represent a single artistic tradition but had many different sources.<sup>20</sup> This diversity is reflected in Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection. A drinking cup with a pair of zoomorphic handles (cat. 215) is very similar to some of the vessels carried by gift-bearers represented on Achaemenid facade reliefs at Persepolis, and must be of Iranian origin. A pair of belt plaques (cat. 19) stands out, as they were chased rather than cast and are stylistically very close to some zoomorphic ornaments excavated in the Issyk burial mound in modern Kazakhstan.<sup>21</sup> Finally, a group of similar objects from the fourth and third centuries BC (cats 20–21) has direct parallels from Inner Asia: an armlet now in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Cologne, another in the Peshawar Museum and four pieces from the Oxus Treasure.<sup>22</sup> In this group, the flanks and shoulders of animals were decorated with coloured inlay (now usually detached) of complex abstract shapes; comparable motifs are present on some objects from Pazyryk, Altai and Xinjiang. This style is not typical

of Iranian art and must have originated in the nomadic borderlands of Iran. For a long time, the use of the gold aigrette (cat. 224) remained uncertain, but a recent convincing reconstruction of a man’s headgear from Pazyryk-2 (cats 36–37) shows that it must have formed part of a hat.<sup>23</sup>

Since most of the princely burial chambers at Pazyryk were looted in antiquity, it is hard to estimate the total number of imported artefacts that they once contained, but two silver belt plates with animal combat scenes and a pair of gold earrings with coloured inlays survived at Pazyryk-2 (cat. 66). However, the subsidiary horse burials placed outside the main tomb chamber were often untouched by robbers and have yielded a number of important finds. Several unique Near Eastern artefacts come from the horse burial in Pazyryk-5: the earliest surviving knotted-pile carpet (fig. 161), a horse chest-strap with lions (cat. 223) and fragments from purple-dyed ceremonial clothing (fig. 162). Some bridle and saddle ornaments from other horse burials feature winged,

horned lions or lions’ heads with curly manes (cat. 189); similar motifs are found on Achaemenid gold plaques and a glazed brick frieze from Susa and later ivory drinking horns from Bactria.

A number of lacquer-decorated leather pieces found in the Pazyryk burial mounds show connections with China (fig. 163). All fifth- to third-century BC burials (except for the earliest one at Bashadar-2) contain such items, but they become particularly common towards the end of this period. Since the technique and chemical composition of the lacquer varies from one piece to another, they may have been made in different parts of China. Many, however, are likely to originate from the southern state of Chu, which was renowned for its silk weaving and lacquerwork. Most of the Pazyryk finds are small ornaments for clothing or horse tackle, which were evidently cut from imported lacquered leather by local craftsmen. A set of bridle ornaments (fig. 164) and a saddle from Pazyryk-3 must have been entirely made in China;<sup>24</sup> the saddle has close parallels among north

Fig. 161  
Knotted-pile woollen carpet from  
the Pazyryk-5 burial mound. L. 183,  
W. 200 cm. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1687-93







Fig. 162  
Iranian woollen saddlecloth, from  
the fifth burial mound at Pazyryk.  
L. 235, W. 60 cm. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1687-100

Chinese finds<sup>25</sup> and on the horse figures in Emperor Qin Shi Huang's 'terracotta army'.<sup>26</sup>  
A lacquered vessel fragment from the Shibe burial mound carries typical Qin-dynasty ornament. A partly preserved Chinese mirror from mound 6 at Pazyryk is datable between 311 and 222 BC.<sup>27</sup> The relatively few Chinese textiles at Pazyryk also come from third-century burial mounds: mound 3 at Pazyryk, for example, has yielded a purse and a scrap of patterned silk (cat. 233), while the cylindrical element of a piece of headgear found in mound 5 at Pazyryk was wrapped in plain silk. A felt saddlecloth from the same tumulus was covered with a large silk embroidery originally measuring 44 by 300 cm across (fig. 165). Its composition and style are similar to an embroidery from tomb 1 at Mashan (Hubei province) and a fragmentary textile from the so-called 'Wooden Coffin Tomb' in the Hunan Martyr's Park of Changsha, the former dating between 340 and 278 BC and the latter from the Warring States period.<sup>28</sup>

Most Chinese imports at Pazyryk come from third-century BC contexts, and local craftsmen started borrowing Chinese ornamental motifs at that time. Peter the Great's Siberian Collection includes belt ornaments of later date, which show that the nomads of southern Siberia remained in contact with the Chinese Empire and the Xiongnu (cat. 25). These strong eastern connections continue to be apparent in the material culture and connections of later cultures in southern Siberia, as is discussed in the next chapter.



**ABOVE**  
Fig. 163  
Bridle decorated with lacquered  
leather, from the fifth burial mound  
at Pazyryk. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1687/138-142, 150

**ABOVE, RIGHT**  
Fig. 164  
Bone saddle-ornament with traces  
of lacquer, from the third burial  
mound at Pazyryk. L. 13.7, H. 5.6 cm.  
Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1685-261

**RIGHT**  
Fig. 165  
Saddlecloth of embroidered silk,  
from the fifth burial mound at  
Pazyryk. Third century BC.  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, 1687/101



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**Clay tablet with cuneiform inscription referring to a diplomatic marriage**

By the 670s BC, Scythian raiders had joined forces with other tribes to threaten the northern zone of the Assyrian empire.<sup>29</sup> Esarhaddon of Assyria (r. 680–669 BC) records a victory against this coalition, in about 676, in which he killed the Scythian leader Ishpaka. His successor, Bartatua (the Protothyes of Herodotus), asked Esarhaddon for an Assyrian princess in diplomatic marriage. Esarhaddon's reaction survives on this clay tablet (all its different sides shown here) excavated at the Assyrian capital at Nineveh: he asked the gods whether Bartatua would remain loyal to the treaty that would be imposed, and would act honestly and in good faith.<sup>30</sup> We deduce that the answer (after two attempts) was positive, since the Scythians apparently became valuable allies of Assyria. Classical tradition records that Madyes – perhaps the son of Bartatua and his Assyrian wife – defended Nineveh against Assyria's Median enemies. **IT**

Clay  
H. 15, W. 18.3, D. 4.3 cm  
About 676 BC  
Kuyunjik, Nineveh, northern Iraq  
(excavations by H. Rassam)  
British Museum, London, K.11489



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**Fired clay prism referring to how Esarhaddon asserted his might**

The reign of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria from 680 to 669 BC, began with a family feud. He had been nominated as crown prince despite being the youngest among his brothers. Having murdered their father, King Sennacherib (r. 705–681 BC), the brothers turned on Esarhaddon and each other. However, according to multiple versions of his own inscriptions, including this fragmentary example, Esarhaddon had the support of the gods, and the self-styled 'valiant warrior ... raged like a lion' and smashed the rebel forces.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, around the whole circumference of his empire, disloyal vassals and hostile neighbours sought to take advantage of the chaos gripping Assyria. Esarhaddon 'marched triumphantly from the rising sun to the setting sun' to confront them and reassert control. Among the enemies he defeated were the Scythians: 'I scattered the Mannean people, undisciplined Gutians, and its army; I put to the sword Ishpaka, a Scythian, an ally who could not save himself.'<sup>32</sup> Behind the bravado of the official accounts, such extensive campaigning must have taken its toll on Assyria. Esarhaddon will have been relieved to recruit the Scythians as allies in the wake of this hostile encounter. **IT**

Fired clay  
H. 9.8, W. 7.6 cm  
673 BC  
Nineveh, northern Iraq (excavations by R. C. Thompson, 1927/28)  
British Museum, London, 1929,1012.528



# Scythian grave goods from the Black Sea cemetery of the Greek colony at Nymphaeum

The Greek colony at Nymphaeum was founded in the sixth century BC south of Kerch, at the eastern end of the Crimean peninsula. There have been extensive Russian excavations here since the nineteenth century. In December 1868 a small number of burial mounds were drilled into by a German engineer called Franz Biller.<sup>33</sup> The finds were offered for sale to the director of the Museum of Antiquities at Kerch, A. Lyutsenko (1807–1884), who published a report on the finds but declined their purchase, and they were acquired instead by Biller's superior, the German-born entrepreneur and engineer Sir Charles William Siemens (1823–1883), who owned large mineral holdings in the Caucasus and was then directing the laying of part of the Indo-European Telegraph across the straits of Kerch. In 1870 Siemens was given an honorary doctorate by the University of Oxford in recognition of his engineering achievements and he presented his collection there a decade later on the proviso that it would be made publicly accessible; they have been part of the Ashmolean Museum's collection ever since. Apart from a collection of bronze weapons from the Minusinsk region in the British Museum, they represent the only collection of Scythian antiquities in a public collection in Britain. The result of antiquarian digging rather than modern archaeological excavations, they illustrate the complex interplay of cultural contacts in the Black Sea region during the late fifth century BC; they include imports from Italy, Greece and Turkey, as well as Scythian objects and others loosely inspired by Achaemenid craftsmanship. They range from drinking cups of silver and pottery to gold jewelry, mirrors and arms and armour. The surviving contents of three of these tombs belonging to both men and women are included here.<sup>34</sup> **sus**

## 192–198 Grave IV

A plain wooden coffin belonging to a female burial was found inside a 2.1-m-long stone chamber sunk 60–90 cm below ground level in the south-west corner of a large burial mound.<sup>35</sup> The remains of a wooden chair, cups and a pair of spindles were found outside the coffin but do not survive, as they were 'quite rotten, spongy and falling to pieces when touched'.<sup>36</sup> A sponge (which does not survive) and a small silver cup with soldered handles and a foot ring were found near the left hand of the body, and a *patera* (libation dish), perhaps an Etruscan import, and a circular disc mirror by her right (cats 192, 194). A bronze wine-strainer with a handle terminating in the form of a duck's head was also present, and was originally used to sieve coarse wine decanted from an amphora (cat. 193). The silver drinking cup is 98.7% silver, equivalent to 33.33 Persian silver coins, and is a rare survival, as most ancient Greek silver was melted down for reuse; however, this form inspired Attic potters to imitate it in black-glaze pottery, which some scholars believe imitated the dark appearance of the pure silver mined locally at Laurium, and causing the Greek philosopher Thrasyalces to remark that 'silver is black'.<sup>37</sup> However, neither the dish nor mirror is complete and they must have been made of composite materials that were not preserved: one of the frozen Scythian tombs at Pazyryk

possessed a similar silver disc mirror where the tang was set into a cylindrical horn handle (fig. 116).<sup>38</sup>

The skeleton in this grave was wearing an outstanding gold necklace decorated with a row of alternating rosettes and lotuses, each with smaller central rosettes, and suspending a row of alternating acorns and ovoid gold beads (cat. 198). At the time of discovery, the rosettes bore traces of colour described as decomposed enamel, but no traces of this remain. A scientific examination concluded on the basis of the shape of the eyelets that it was made to be worn rather than simply for the grave.<sup>39</sup> Two electrum-covered copper-alloy spirals decorated with granulation and applied wire were discovered next to the shoulders and were possibly worn in the hair, implying, if so, that the woman wore her hair long (cat. 196).<sup>40</sup> Finally, a large number of tiny gold-sheet appliqué representing crouching lions were found 'scattered from the neck over the breast and body'. The holes in the corners show how they were originally sewn onto a garment; they were made by impressing a matrix into the back (cat. 197).<sup>41</sup> In other graves such appliqué were worn in facing pairs, whereas this set simply consists of lions facing left, so it is possible that this only represents half of the original total. **sus**

192. Mirror disc  
Bronze  
Diam. 17.5 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.470b

193. Strainer  
Bronze  
L. 24.6, diam. 11.8 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.487



**194. Silver handled cup**  
Silver  
H. 5.6, diam. 10.5, W. 16.2 cm,  
wt 183.31 g  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford,  
AMO 1885.486

**195. Patera handle**  
Bronze  
L. 18 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford,  
AMO 1885.470a

**196. Hair spirals**  
Electrum-covered bronze  
H. 3.5 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford  
AMO, 1885.483

**197. Gold appliqués**  
Gold  
L. 1.3 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford,  
AMO 1885.480

**198. Gold necklace**  
Gold  
L. 31 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford,  
AMO 1885.482





Grave V

A badly preserved wooden coffin was found inside a relatively large burial mound next to the beach.<sup>42</sup> It is thought to have belonged to a woman, and contained a finger ring and a chalcedony scaraboid found ‘in the region of the neck and breast [that] probably served as an amulet’.<sup>43</sup> This depicts a rampant winged horned lion of a type taken straight from Achaemenid iconography and represented as apotropaic beasts flanking either side of the windowsills in the so-called ‘Palace of Darius’ (Tachara) at Persepolis (fig. 166). These were a popular motif on so-called ‘Greco-Persian’ scaraboid carved stamp seals made in western Anatolia during the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC: many have been found in Scythian graves in the northern Black Sea region; some may be contemporary, as in the case of both the seals from this cemetery (see also cat. 210), but in other cases heirlooms a century or more older in date.<sup>44</sup> **sus**



199. Scaraboid stamp seal and impression  
Chalcedony  
H. 2.7, W. 2 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.491

**BOTTOM LEFT**  
Fig. 166  
Side of a doorway in the Palace of Darius at Persepolis, showing a royal hero stabbing a mythical beast.



Grave VI

This burial mound contained a wooden coffin orientated east/west with the head at the east, and the grave goods indicate it belonged to a male warrior buried wearing a plain electrum circular torc with undecorated terminals (cat. 202), scale armour and a pair of plain copper-alloy greaves worn like a footballer’s shin pads on his lower legs (cats 201, 204).<sup>45</sup> Only one of the greaves survives. It is composed of thirteen strips of copper alloy attached by bronze wire to a sheep- or goatskin backing edged in calfskin and, as there are no holes for attachment, must have been inserted into a thick sock or boot. A solid cast copper-alloy plaque in the form of an elk’s head was also found and represents a classic example of Scythian ‘Animal Style’ art: following the report published by A. Lyutsenko, Vickers believed a loop on the back originally attached this to the front of the armour, but it is identical to many other examples, found in excavations both in the same cemetery and at Zhorovka in the Kiev region, that were attached to horse bridles (cat. 200).<sup>46</sup> The armour itself consists of rows of hammered copper-alloy plates sewn onto a double-leather backing with rawhide thongs; this surviving section is edged with a leather strip and was worn like an epaulette to afford additional protection to the shoulder. This warrior was also accompanied by three imported Attic black-glaze pottery vessels and a bronze ladle with a goose-head (rather than more normal duck’s-head) terminal (cat. 203). Ladles such as this were a standard item in drinking sets, and were used to scoop wine into a drinking cup from the crater or large bowl where it had been mixed with water. The form of the ladle dates the grave to the late fifth century BC. **sus**

200. Elk’s-head plaque  
Copper alloy  
H. 8.3, W. 11.6 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.466



201. Armour scales  
Copper alloy, leather  
L. 22.5, W. 13 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.465

202. Torc  
Electrum  
Diam. 17.5 cm, wt 165 g  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.472

203. Ladle  
Bronze  
L. 34.5 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.473

204. Greave  
Copper alloy  
H. 20.4 cm  
Late fifth century BC  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AMO 1885.463



Gold vessel with images of Scythian tribesmen

Globular vessels have been found in many Scythian burials and appear to have been used in ritual ceremonies. This famous gold example is among the most spectacular finds recovered from the Kul' Oba burial mound.<sup>47</sup> The main tomb inside was discovered on 19 September 1830 by soldiers quarrying stone. With the permission of I. A. Stempkovsky (1789–1832), the municipal governor of Kerch, it was excavated under the direction of the French émigré Paul Du Brux (1770–1835), who produced a report with drawings, a description of the burial chamber and an inventory of the objects found.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately the excavations were conducted in haste and many features were not completely or accurately recorded. The burial mound covered a stone tomb consisting of a short corridor and a step-roofed burial chamber. Inside was a painted wooden coffin, where a man's skeleton lay next to a set of weapons and other objects. He wore a massive gold torc around his neck and gold bracelets on his arms, and gold

plaques were found around his body; his quiver was decorated with gold plaques, as was his sword. The burial also contained a whetstone and a gold bowl. On a wooden couch next to the coffin were found the remains of a woman wearing a gold diadem, torc, necklace, a pair of earrings and gold plaques that had originally been sewn onto clothing. This gold vessel lay next to her feet. These two individuals must have been of royal lineage, and at their head lay another man, evidently their servant. The tomb contained other grave goods, including a large amount of gold jewelry, mostly Scythian or Greek in style, but some manufactured by urban Greek craftsmen for nomad patrons. When the guards stationed at the excavation site left their post to shelter from a storm, looters managed to lift the floor slabs in the chamber and found a second burial beneath; among the objects recovered from here was a now-famous gold plaque with a reclining deer.

The Greek letters ΔΔΠ scratched on the base of this bowl may indicate the original weight of the object, and the foot ring is evidently a later addition. The main part of the design runs around

the shoulder above a braided register, with radiating rounded petals below and a flower with eight rounded petals enclosed within two concentric lines with a centring mark in the middle of the base. The relief decoration shows two Scythians having their wounds nursed, a pair of conversing men and a warrior stringing his bow.<sup>49</sup> These scenes were once assumed to depict the everyday life of commoners or royalty, but most scholars now think they illustrate a Scythian mythological epic.<sup>50</sup> According to a legend reported by Herodotus, Heracles' son Scythes received the kingship after managing to string his father's bow. The two wounded men must be Scythes' elder brothers Agathysus and Gelonus, who failed the test and whom the snapping bow (as experience shows) must have hit on the chin and shin.<sup>51</sup> The conversation scene either concludes the narrative or shows Heracles setting up the test. **AVK**



Gilt-silver vase showing Scythians

Gold  
H. 13 cm, wt 328.12 g  
Second half of the fourth century BC,  
Bosporan Kingdom  
Kul' Oba, near Kerch, northern Black Sea region  
(excavations by Paul Du Brux, 1830)  
State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg, K-O.11

This vase shows six seated or kneeling armed Scythian men grouped in three pairs and engaged in conversation with each other, gesturing or, in one case, extending a strung bow to the only clean-shaven member of the group.<sup>52</sup> The iconography has been interpreted as a representation of Scythians recounting tales of their own history, as described by Herodotus.<sup>53</sup> The decoration was created through a combination of embossing, chasing and gilding. This vessel was found in a physically unremarkable burial mound, but as it also contained a relatively large number of gold items it must have belonged to a person of some private wealth. It was one of thirteen burial mounds excavated at Chastye Kurgany, on the right bank of the Don, in 1910–12 and 1915, under the auspices of a learned society based in the nearby city of Voronezh. Since then, all forty-one tumuli at the site have been studied.<sup>54</sup> In 1911 the priest and antiquarian S. E. Zverev (1861–1920) and his colleagues excavated burial mound 3, in the southern part of the cemetery. This unusually

small mound measured some 15 m in diameter and slightly over 2 m in height. It covered a grave pit of 5 by 4 m, its walls lined with wooden planks. This had been disturbed by robbers at an early date, but still contained the remains of two human bodies and what appeared to have been a horse. The principal burial contained a sword with a gold-covered hilt, a bracelet, a whetstone, gold-decorated belt clasps and gold plaques once sewn to the clothing of the deceased. Beside the body lay this now-famous silver vessel with images of Scythian warriors.<sup>55</sup> **AYuA**

Gilt silver  
H. 10.5 cm, diam. 9.5 cm  
Fourth century BC  
Tomb 3, Chastye Kurgany, Don river region near Voronezh city, northern Black Sea region  
(excavations by S. Zverev, A. Martinovich and V. Yazykov, 1911)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1911 1/11





**Gilt-silver vase showing a hunting scene**

The gilded relief decoration on this bowl is arranged in several registers. Around the rim is a garland of two ivy plants; below are two almost symmetrical hunting scenes. On one side two young horsemen in typical Scythian dress and carrying bows and spears are hunting a lion with dogs. On the other side hunters are attacking a fantastic creature, a horned lioness. The presence of such a being may point to a mythological or legendary nature of the scene, but its meaning remains a mystery, despite different hypotheses suggesting it shows the exploits of a Scythian hero, a ritual victory over the predator, aiding the Great Goddess, or a battle between the 'world of the living' and the 'world of the dead'. It is notable that all the subjects of the scene are young warriors. The distinctive shape of the vessel is typical for Scythian special occasion and ritual tableware, but these were often made of wood and decorated with hammered gold plates depicting deer, fish, predators and birds of prey.

This vase was found in the great burial mound known as Solokha, on the left bank of the lower Dnieper and close to the village of Bol'shaya Znamenka. This mound was partially excavated in 1912–1913 by the noted Russian archaeologist N. I. Veselovsky.<sup>56</sup> A large mound (diameter approx. 110 m, maximum height 18 m) covered two burials. The principal burial had been robbed at an early date but still contained a silver kylix (cup) inscribed with the Greek letters ΑΥΚΟ, gold plaques originally sewn onto ceremonial attire, a gold pin, Greek amphorae, bronze arrowheads and other objects. The undisturbed remains of two horses retained their gold-ornamented gear. A later burial of a Scythian 'king' accompanied by three more individuals and five jointly interred horses was found intact. Plaques of gold were originally sewn onto the king's clothing, he wore a gold torc around his neck, his chest was covered with a composite golden net and he wore five gold armlets. Next to him lay two swords (the hilt and sheath of one were covered in gold) and a silver-covered quiver. On top of the latter was placed a golden *phiale* (bowl) with two Greek inscriptions (now heavily worn). On the king's



right were a golden comb splendidly adorned with figures of battling Scythians, a mace, a Greek bronze helmet reworked by Scythian armourers, cast bronze cauldrons, and a number of pottery and silver vessels of various shape. Radiocarbon dates and the typologies of the Greek kylix, Greek amphorae and horse gear indicate that the principal burial occurred at the very end of the fifth century BC, while the secondary burial dates to the early fourth century BC. Some scholars identify the latter as the tomb of King Octamasades and the former as possibly that of his brother Oricus: both were mentioned by Herodotus.<sup>57</sup> **AYuA**

Gilt silver  
H. 12.1, diam. 18.7 cm  
400–380 BC  
Side burial, Solokha, northern Black Sea region (excavations by N. I. Veselovsky, 1913)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1913 1/40



**Gilt-silver vase showing scenes of animal combat**

The detailed execution, carefully arranged figural compositions and ornamental motifs on this vessel betray the hand of a Greek master.<sup>58</sup> Some scholars have assumed that he worked in Thrace,<sup>59</sup> but the Bosphoran Kingdom seems a more likely location.<sup>60</sup> The object was discovered in 1830 by the west wall of the stone burial chamber in the Kul' Oba burial mound.<sup>61</sup> Together with two other similar silver pieces, it was placed on a silver platter supported by a bronze stand and close to a woman's skeleton. A second platter, just to the north, held further drinking vessels, including a plain silver cup similar in shape. Scythian tombs often contain globular vessels of this type,<sup>62</sup> and these were evidently associated with the burial rites. These vessels were intended either for exclusively ritual purposes, as many scholars tend to think, or perhaps also for use at the funerary banquet. The object's function is emphasized by the fantastic and real animals depicted on it: in antiquity,

beasts preying on herbivores were associated with the netherworld.<sup>63</sup> At Kul' Oba, the present vessel evidently formed an essential part of a Scythian chieftain's grave goods.<sup>64</sup> **AB**

Chased and engraved silver  
H. 10.6, diam. 10.2 cm  
Fourth century BC  
Kul' Oba, near Kerch, northern Black Sea region (excavations by Paul Du Brux, 1830)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, K-O.97



Ram-shaped drinking horn

The ancient Greeks adopted the drinking horn (*rhyton*) under eastern, primarily Persian, influence: such vessels were often made of precious metal and featured in Achaemenid aristocratic dining feasts.<sup>66</sup> Their zoomorphic terminals were usually manufactured separately from the horn, and a hole for pouring was made in the animal's chest or muzzle. However, despite the general similarity of the Kul' Oba horn to ancient Near Eastern examples, it lacks this hole, and in this respect resembles Greek *rhyta*, which were used like goblets and drunk from the rim.<sup>66</sup> The main part of a Greek *rhyton*, often made of pottery, could be shaped like an animal's head. The ram on the Kul' Oba horn can be easily removed from the surmounting truncated cone. Scientific analyses show that the outer walls and the inside of the lip of this horn were originally gilded.<sup>67</sup> The animal figure is composite: its horns and (now-lost) ears

were made separately and then welded into specially made sockets. The naturalistic treatment points to a Greek workshop located in the Balkans, Anatolia or the northern Black Sea coast.<sup>68</sup> The piece was found by the western wall of the Kul' Oba burial chamber, where it lay together with another drinking horn and two further silver vessels on a silver platter supported by a bronze stand.<sup>69</sup> Slightly further south was a second similar platter with more vessels on it. Against the wall were propped several pottery amphorae, probably once full of wine. Before it was deposited in the tomb, the horn was probably used in the funerary ceremony. **AB**

Silver  
H. 14, diam. 9.3 cm  
Late fifth to fourth century BC  
Kul' Oba, near Kerch, northern Black Sea region (excavations by Paul Du Brux, 1830)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, K-O.104



Scaraboid seal with a ring-handle

Carved stone or glass personal seals and amulets were commonly used in antiquity.<sup>70</sup> Impressed on wax or clay, a seal effectively replaced the signature on a letter or document or secured one's personal property: caskets, storerooms, amphorae with wine or olive oil, loom weights and so on. It is claimed that jealous husbands would even seal the women's quarters in their house.<sup>71</sup> Some seals imitated scarab beetles, which the ancient Egyptians considered sacred, but only the general shape of the insect is retained here. This seal was discovered in 1876 on the hand of a person buried in a burial mound near ancient Nymphaeum in Crimea. One side shows a cow and calf; the other, a winged solar disc. The latter image is of Persian origin and symbolizes the Iranian god Ahuramazda. Its presence in a Scythian-type burial near a Greek colony attests contacts between Achaemenid Iran and the northern Black Sea coast. It is among the oldest glass seals from the Bosphorus region and was probably manufactured locally.<sup>72</sup> **AVK**

Gold, glass paste  
L. 3.5, H. 1.8, W. 1.3 cm  
Fifth century BC, Bosporan Kingdom  
Tomb 19, Nymphaeum burial mound 24/1876, northern Black Sea region  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, GK/N.84



Athenian plate showing a Scythian archer

Scythian archers enjoyed a brief popularity in the imagery of Athenian pottery around 530–490 BC.<sup>73</sup> On this plate the archer runs left, looking back, while pulling an arrow from his quiver, with the bow in his extended left hand. His costume consists of a soft skin hat with long ear-flaps, intricately patterned trousers and a tight-fitting sleeved jacket, and is also found on other 'Easterners' – both Persians and Amazons – in Athenian art;<sup>74</sup> here a Scythian is intended, since the quiver, worn at the waist, is a broad, scale-decorated Scythian *gorytos* with space for both bow and arrows,<sup>75</sup> while the composite double-curved bow is paralleled in the earliest Scythian burials.<sup>76</sup> But there are also inconsistencies, as in most Athenian images of

'Easterners', which are less accurate and differentiated than later Greco-Scythian representations.<sup>77</sup> The tightness of the archer's 'body suit' is a Greek artistic modification, and his rounded cap is more Persian in comparison to the pointed *kyrbasia* noted as typically Scythian by Herodotus.<sup>78</sup> However, pointed headgear need not have been a universal Scythian fashion; Achaemenid sources characterize only one *Sakā* tribe specifically as 'pointed-hat Scythians'.<sup>79</sup>

From the earlier sixth century BC, Athenians would have known of the peoples of the north Pontic steppes from contacts with the Greek settlements on the northern Black Sea coast, while Scythians became one of the main ethnic groups among Athenian slaves.<sup>80</sup> Scythian archers may have served in the Athenian army earlier, but it is only in the fifth century BC that Scythian slaves are securely attested at Athens, when public slaves known as

'Scythian archers' served as city police; it remains unclear, though, whether they wore Scythian costume or were even all ethnically Scythian.<sup>81</sup> Rather than a faithful representation of Greek reality, the drawing on the plate blends the actual with the imaginary to create an image of a Scythian that embodied both exotic 'otherness' and the ideal of the skilled archer, which had become synonymous with the Scythians. **AV**

Pottery  
Diam. 19.5 cm  
Made in Athens, Greece, c. 520–500 BC; signed by Epiktetos the painter  
Vulci, Italy  
British Museum, London, 1837,0609.59 (Vase E135)<sup>82</sup>





Chertomlyk (originally known as ‘Fat Burial Mound’), on the right bank of the lower Dnieper close to the city of Nikopol, was excavated in 1862/63 by the Moscow historian I. E. Zabelin (1820–1908).<sup>83</sup> Complete excavation proved impracticable because of the enormous size of the mound – which is about 20 m high and as much as 115 to 120 m across, with a massive stone wall round its base – and as he was so short of funds, Zabelin only dug in the centre of the mound. The burials he found had been partly robbed. A principal tomb contained the bodies of a Scythian ‘king’, a noblewoman, two warriors and several servants. In three adjacent pits lay the remains of two ‘grooms’ and of eleven horses whose gear had been covered in gold and silver. These burials and accompanying ‘treasure deposits’ yielded ceremonial arms and armour, clothing ornaments, gold jewelry (earrings, finger rings, bracelets, torcs), a set of ritual silver vessels (jar, dish, ladle), pottery amphorae, bronze cauldrons and so on. More recently, in 1979, 1981 and 1983–86, the burial mound was thoroughly re-excavated by a Ukraïno–German archaeological team directed by B. N. Mozolevsky, V. Yu. Murzin and R. Rolle. Besides clarifying the structure of the mound and certain tombs beneath it, their work uncovered several further burials. All of these – including a large secondary burial, the Northern Grave – had been looted at an early date.<sup>84</sup> It now seems likely that Chertomlyk was a ‘royal’ Scythian tomb of c. 350–310 BC and that the secondary Northern Grave dates from the late fourth century BC.

This fragmentary iron sword with gold hilt was found hidden in a recess in the burial complex at Chertomlyk during the excavations by I. E. Zabelin in 1863. It has attracted a great deal of academic interest and speculation over its origin and date.<sup>85</sup> One scholar has proposed it might be Scythian booty captured after the late-sixth-century BC invasion by Darius, which is described by Herodotus;<sup>86</sup> another suggested it could have been a gift to the Scythians by Alexander the Great in an exchange of embassies in 329/328, as described by the second-century AD historian Arrian;<sup>87</sup> and a third proposed it to be Median and dating to the fifth century BC.<sup>88</sup>

The decorated gold-overlay hilt has many Achaemenid features and has been variously dated between the late sixth and mid-fourth centuries BC,<sup>89</sup> the openwork tanged iron blade is typical of swords found in fourth-century Scythian burial mounds,<sup>90</sup> and the gold scabbard is decorated in Greco-Scythian style with five scenes interpreted as being either of the Trojan War or of an episode from a battle between the Macedonians and Persians.<sup>91</sup> One possibility is that this is an Achaemenid sword later reworked in Scythia in the fourth century BC.<sup>92</sup> However, the apparent discrepancy in date between the early Achaemenid and later Scythian parallels can be reconciled as some of the stylistic features also recur as late as the mid-fourth century BC: the stylized palm tree along the centre of the grip resembles the decoration on Palace G at Persepolis, constructed by Artaxerxes III (r. 359–338 BC) and later transferred to the north staircase of Palace H,<sup>93</sup> and the antithetical calves’ heads resemble a class of post-Achaemenid finials found from Babylonia to Bactria.<sup>94</sup> In any case, the absence of rivets securing the hilt overlay to the tang suggests this weapon may have been intended only for display or the grave. **AYuA, SUs**

Gold, iron  
L. 14.9, W. 2.8 (hilt), W. 5.5 cm (cross guard)  
Third quarter of the fourth century BC  
Chertomlyk, Dnieper region, northern Black Sea region (excavations by I. Zabelin, 1863)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,  
Dn 1863 1/448



On 29 September 522 BC, Darius I (r. 522–486 BC) killed a usurper called Gaumata and began a series of campaigns to establish himself as the rightful ruler of the Achaemenid empire. He celebrated these events with a monumental rock relief at Bisitun overlooking one of the main routes connecting highland western Iran with Mesopotamia. It ends with a short description of his last campaign in 519 BC against the ‘pointed-hat’ Scythians, and depicts their king, Skunkha, in chains. Other Scythians reappear on Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis among tributary peoples, either as figures supporting the enthroned Achaemenid king or bringing gifts to the court. Later, according to Greek sources, Darius campaigned in the northern Black Sea region in about 513 BC. A brief account of this is also given by the fifth-century BC Greek historian Ctesias, who begins by referring to a campaign by Ariaramnes, satrap of Cappadocia, who seized a number of high-profile hostages; this provoked angry correspondence between the Scythian king Scytharches and Darius, who took an

army across the Black Sea but after a fifteen-day march abandoned the expedition when ‘the two sides fired arrows at each other and the Scythians prevailed’.<sup>95</sup> Later still, Cyrus II (r. 550–530 BC) is said to have campaigned against tribes on the north-eastern edge of the Persian Empire, but died on campaign somewhere near the Aral Sea, and a line of Achaemenid forts around the northern edge of the Merv oasis in southern Turkmenistan clearly represents an attempt to control movement across this part of the frontier.<sup>96</sup>

Representations of battles are fairly common on Achaemenid seals, and show figures in Persian dress fighting a variety of Scythians and other Central Asian peoples, Egyptians and Greeks.<sup>97</sup> Although some scholars have viewed these battle scenes as pictorial records of real events commissioned by the individuals who owned these seals, it is more likely that they are purely symbolic and contrast the sense of order within the Achaemenid Empire with the chaos beyond; the image of a crowned archer was a central part of royal Achaemenid ideology.<sup>98</sup> The same applies to an extended scene painted on an interior wall of a log tomb chamber from Tatarlı in south-west Turkey that was tree-ring dated to the early fifth century BC (fig. 167).<sup>99</sup>

This cylinder seal is carved from a mottled red and pale brown dolomitic limestone, and details the different forms of dress and weaponry used by the two opposing sides.<sup>100</sup> The Achaemenid figure on the left wears a long belted Persian robe and a dentate crown, has a long squared beard and wears his hair in a bun. He is shown drawing a composite bow at the opposite figure, who wears a pointed Scythian cap, belted short tunic over trousers and a large bow case on his right thigh, while brandishing a pointed battle-axe with a spiked butt. Between the two figures are a roaring lion and a large dog, assuming protective positions on the Achaemenid side, and on the far right stands a small monkey-like figure leaning on a staff. **SUs**

Dolomitic limestone  
L. 2.9, diam. 1.3 cm  
About 400 BC  
Provenance unknown  
British Museum, London, 1945.1013.113



Reconstruction of a wooden comb showing an Achaemenid chariot in combat

This two-sided comb was discovered in 2012 in a grave in western Kazakhstan, in burial mound 6 of the Taksai-I complex, 8 km from Dolinnoe village in Terekti district. The tomb belonged to a noblewoman nicknamed after excavation ‘Altun Hanum’ (‘Golden Lady’) because of her rich gold grave goods. The comb was presumably used within a ritual context, as it was in a wooden box together with a knife, a fine white pottery bottle resembling alabaster, a sandstone mortar and wolf fangs, some of which were perforated and mounted in gold to be suspended as pendants or amulets.<sup>101</sup> The comb is carved from poplar wood: on one side the teeth are short and fine, and on the other, long and coarse. The central part of the comb is decorated with a figural composition, repeated on both sides, that depicts a battle scene. A heavy two-wheeled chariot drawn by a pair of ram-headed horses is carrying a bearded charioteer and a beardless archer who are fighting a single enemy on foot. They are wearing similar long-sleeved jackets, but are differentiated by their headgear. While the warriors on the chariot are wearing flat caps on their straggly straight hair, their opponent has a pointed soft cap tied under the chin. Although a quiver is hanging from his belt, the foot soldier is fighting barehanded, holding the reins of the horses to stop the chariot moving forwards. With his raised right hand he seems to argue in a last desperate act of defence. This combat scene is an abbreviated depiction of the multi-figured battle friezes illustrating a generic Persian victory over the Scythian tribes, and can best be paralleled with the battle frieze of the Tatarlı tomb in south-west Turkey (fig. 167). **LS, YL**

Wood  
H. 5.8, W. 10.6, D. 0.7 cm  
500–450 BC  
Mound 6, Taksai-I, western Kazakhstan  
(excavations by M. N. Sdykar and Y. A. Lukpanova)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 2213

Fig. 167  
Replica of a painted beam from a Persian-period tomb at Tatarlı in south-west Turkey, showing a Persian victory over ‘pointed-hat Scythians’.



Gold vessel with horizontal fluting

This gold vessel from Peter the Great’s Siberian Collection probably originated in the Achaemenid Empire, as similar vessels with zoomorphic handles are depicted being brought by tributaries on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis. Horizontal fluting is a highly diagnostic feature of particular shapes of Achaemenid precious metalwares (figs 168–69).<sup>102</sup> They were copied in cut glass by Phoenician and Anatolian craftsmen: a fragmentary horizontally fluted glass *rhyton* was excavated at Persepolis, but Ignatiadou argues convincingly that most, if not all, glassware found at Achaemenid sites was made by Ionian craftsmen.<sup>103</sup> A spectacular although unprovenanced semi-complete decolourized fluted vessel of *rhyton* form, but lacking a pouring hole, and terminating in the head of a bird of prey has been acquired by the Miho Museum, and scientific analysis of its composition indicates it to be natron glass with antimony decolorant.<sup>104</sup> A number of silver examples survive. The lower portion of one was found by chance in 1967, near the spot where more recent excavations revealed a rich woman’s grave at Taksai-I in western Kazakhstan (see also cats 67, 214, 218);<sup>105</sup> a late fifth- or fourth-century version made in the Black Sea region was found at Kul’ Oba (cat. 209). In other cases, potters in south-west Anatolia may have imitated ruddy gold with red-slipped pottery, and those in Athens are believed by some scholars to have mimicked the effect of dark silver in black-glaze pottery.<sup>106</sup> Very few gold vessels survive in the Achaemenid Empire (or indeed the later Sasanian Empire) because valuable materials such as this were constantly recycled, but a small jug in the Oxus Treasure is an exception and provides the only other surviving example of gold tableware with horizontal fluting (fig. 168).<sup>107</sup>

This vessel has a pair of symmetrical handles in the shape of a feline predator, perhaps a tiger, and the area around the shoulder/neck junction, where the handles are attached to the main body, is decorated with a pair of beaded lines.<sup>108</sup> Gold and silver chalices with animal handles found at Scythian and Sarmatian sites were probably used for ritualistic purposes. According to some researchers, the execution of the ‘Animal Style’,



despite clear Achaemenid influences, suggests Scythian craftsmanship.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, a more specific attribution is impossible owing to the lack of data on the origin of the vessel, its find-spot or circumstances of discovery. **EFK, SUS**

Gold, hammered with hollow handles composed of two sections and riveted to the body  
H. 10.2, diam. 16 cm, wt 923.85 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1727 1/71

Fig. 168  
Fluted gold jug from the Oxus Treasure. H. 13, diam. 8.5 cm, wt 370 g. Achaemenid, fifth to fourth century BC.  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.17  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

Fig. 169  
Fluted metal bucket with swinging handle shown on an Achaemenid sculpture at Persepolis. Fifth century BC.



216  
**Miniature inscribed silver bowl**

This has a two-line alphabetic inscription engraved on the underside. One widely cited translation interprets it as a southern Scythian dialect: 'The vessel should hold wine of grapes, added cooked food, so much, to the mortal, then added cooked fresh butter on', but there are many other interpretations and the inscription remains a mystery.<sup>110</sup> The bowl was found in a very wealthy man's burial (cats 140, 217). **sus**

Silver  
H. 2.2, diam. 7.7 cm, wt 78.7 g  
Fifth to third century BC  
Burial mound, Issyk, south-east Kazakhstan  
(excavations by A. K. Akishev)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan,  
Astana, TK1-1844

217  
**Silver spoon with a long handle terminating in the head of a bird**

The end of the handle terminates in a bird's head. This may be an Achaemenid import, as the double-curve shape of the handle and the tapered spoon are similar to examples found at Pasargadae.<sup>111</sup> The burial it was found in clearly belonged to an individual of high status, judging by the other grave goods (cats 140, 216). **sus**

Silver  
L. 16, W. 3.8 cm  
Fifth to third century BC  
Burial mound, Issyk, south-east Kazakhstan  
(excavations by A. K. Akishev)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan,  
Astana, TK1-1845



218  
**A pair of gold bangles with animal-head terminals**

These bangles were found in the same grave as the wooden comb showing a battle between a Scythian and men in an Achaemenid-style chariot (cat. 214) and were placed on the right wrist of a woman's skeleton.<sup>112</sup> The convex bend of the inner edge is a typical feature of Achaemenid bangles, whether gold, silver or copper alloy, and is represented on sculptures at Persepolis as well as numerous extant objects found across the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>113</sup> However, the terminals of these normally end with the head of a single species, often an ibex, ram or lion, whereas the present examples draw on the essence of 'Animal Style' art by combining the head of a mythical horned lion with that of a sheep or calf, and depicted them so that the lion appears to be pouncing on and devouring the herbivore. The cavities in the eyes, foreheads and horns still contain coloured inlays, which are burned but identified by the excavator as turquoise. **sus, yl**

Gold  
Diam. 7.9, 6.5 cm, wt 182 g  
500–450 BC  
Mound 6, Taksai-I, western Kazakhstan  
(excavations by M. N. Sdykov and Y. A. Lukpanova)  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan,  
Astana, TK2-931

219

**Carved wooden representation of a griffin**

This griffin head in profile belongs to a horse's tack. The griffin here is reduced simply to the head, which was a common feature of steppe art, where the entire beast was symbolized by one element. It shows the eye, mane, ear and crest, all carefully carved. These details may indicate perhaps one of the vultures that are common in the Altai. **H•PF, ZS**

Wood  
H. 6.1, W. 4.1, D. 1 cm  
Fourth to third century BC  
Mound 11, Berel, northern Kazakhstan  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, TK6-8286

220

**Carved wooden representation of a griffin**

This griffin with extended wings, large beak and crest belongs to a horse tack and is a part of a series. These wooden ornaments were originally completely covered with tin or gold foil. Such griffins are very common in the Pazyryk culture in the Altai. **H•PF, ZS**

Wood  
H. 6.8, W. 6.5 cm  
Fourth to third century BC  
Mound 11, Berel, northern Kazakhstan  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, TK6-8797



221

**Carved wooden representation of a griffin**

This carving was originally fixed on top of a copper-alloy nail securing the wooden lid of the coffin placed inside the funerary chamber of Berel-11. It represents a bird of prey or griffin, with extended wings, a tail and a crest. Along with a series of small wooden and gilded sphinxes placed on top of a cloth cover over the lid, this figure may have been a sort of magical protection for the corpse placed within the sarcophagus. **H•PF, ZS**

Wood  
Fourth to third century BC  
Mound 11, Berel, northern Kazakhstan  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 408

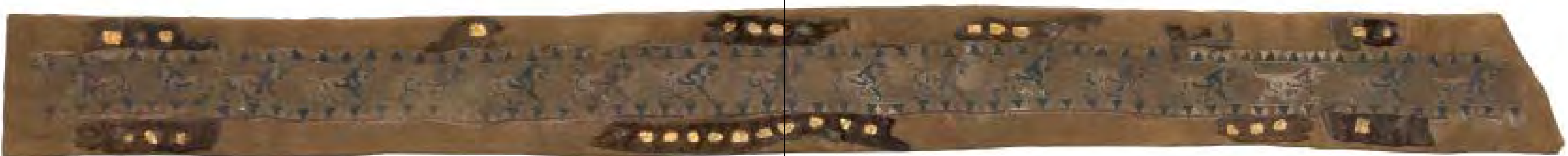
222

**Carved wooden representation of a feline predator and a mountain goat**

This harness pendant is from a series representing the stylized head of a wild goat with spiralled horn. Behind, a feline with its head turned backwards is biting it on the horn. Gold or tin foil originally covered these pieces. This is a very stylized and reduced version of the widespread theme of a predator attacking a herbivore. The S-shaped forms of the goat, its horn and the body of the feline are characteristic of steppe or Scythian art. **H•PF, ZS**

Wood  
H. 5.7, L. 5.4, D. 0.8 cm  
Fourth to third century BC  
Mound 11, Berel, northern Kazakhstan  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, TK4-6196





223

### Horse chest strap showing a procession of lions

This chest strap had a felt base onto which was sewn a strip of cloth with woven images showing a procession of lions. Along the border on the longer sides are sewn-on strips of foal fur with leather squares covered in gold leaf. The material of the chest strap was made using the kilim technique. Prior to weaving, the fibre was dyed with madder, indigo and tannins, as well as a pigment extracted from the cochineal-carrying insect of the *Porphyrophora* genus. The combination of red and blue dyes imitated purple; the white elements are made of undyed linen.

The saddlecloth was also covered in cloth fragments made using the kilim technique. This was dyed purple,<sup>114</sup> and must have been a precious object intended for the highest elite. Purple dye tends to fade quickly and does not travel well, so the cloth coloured with it must have been imported ready-made into the Altai region. Another saddlecloth covered in imported Chinese cloth was discovered in the same burial mound.<sup>115</sup> Judging by the pattern of stylized 'towers' and its similarity to Achaemenid reliefs, the purple cloth fragments may originally

have been part of an Achaemenid cape worn on special occasions, judging by representations at Persepolis, and the hem reused to make this chest strap.<sup>116</sup> Material with identical ornament, although of a different colour, can be seen on one of the guards (so-called 'Immortals') represented on glazed bricks from the Apadana of Darius' palace at Susa.<sup>117</sup> According to E. G. Tsareva, who has studied the technological features of the saddlecloth and chest-strap materials, they were made in a highly developed centre. The purple material of the saddlecloth may have been produced in the eastern Mediterranean, and the chest-strap and saddlecloth piping materials in Egypt.<sup>118</sup> How could these materials have reached the nomads in the remote Altai? Tsareva draws on Plutarch's account of the aftermath of Alexander's capture of Susa in 324 BC, when 5,000 talents of purple cloth were found, 'which, although it had been stored there for 190 years, still kept its colours fresh and lively'.<sup>119</sup> Alexander gave the precious cloth and garments to his allies and warriors, many of whom were foreign troops and therefore may have included Scythians from this region.<sup>120</sup> **EVS, SVP**

Felt, textile (wool, flax), fur, leather, gold foil  
H. 7, L. 80 cm  
Third century BC  
Mound 5, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1687/100b



**Gold headdress ornament (aigrette) with a griffin-vulture pounced on a fallen ram**

This mauling scene is represented through a combination of flat relief for the bodies and the open wings of the bird of prey, and high relief for its head. Several loops in parallel vertical rows along the tail's plumage were possibly used to attach additional decorative details made of another material. This ornament was part of the second parcel sent to Peter the Great by Prince M. P. Gagarin in Tobolsk on 12 December 1716; the accompanying inventory list reads: 'Eagle devouring a ram. Weight 49 *zlotniks*.' Since then it has attracted many different interpretations over its function and significance. Some Russian scholars, namely I. I. Tolstoy, N. P. Kondakov, V. G. Lukonin, A. A. Ivanov and L. S. Smesova, have compared it with a similar piece from the Oxus Treasure (cat. 225) and interpreted it as part of a headdress.<sup>121</sup>

However, there are other interpretations. Among the Scythian-period finds from sites in the Altai region is a remarkably similar carved wooden plaque in the shape of a vulture with open wings, which was excavated by N. V. Polosmak in mound 1 of the Ak-Alakha-3 complex (fig. 170). The bird's

stance, scale-like plumage on the neck and chest, raised top contour feather, long wing feathers and crest are identical. The Altai plaque is a piece of decorative horse headgear originally placed on the horse's forehead. As there are no comparable human headgear ornaments, the assumption is therefore that this is a festive horse-gear ornament. However, E. V. Stepanova has identified complex carved wooden zoomorphic head ornaments from mound 2 at Pazyryk that present a close stylistic and compositional parallel to the gold aigrette from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (cat. 37). In this case, this gold aigrette could be assumed to be part of a ritual headdress comparable to that from Pazyryk, although its manufacturing technique relates it to a distinctive class of Achaemenid jewelry with polychrome inlays.<sup>122</sup> These were probably inspired by Syro-Phoenician culture: the famous pair of armlets with griffin terminals from the Oxus Treasure are the best known examples (fig. 171). This piece is one of several that illustrate connections between the Oxus Treasure, the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great and finds from the Altai region. Such ornaments carry conceptual and traditional meanings relating to life, death and sacrifice informed by mythological and cosmological notions. **EFK**

Gold, glue; matrix-moulded, soldered with polychrome inlay, possibly turquoise or red and light blue smalt; twelve loops on the reverse  
H. 15.6, W. 16 cm, wt 209.6 g  
Fourth to third century BC  
Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (sent by M. P. Gagarin, the governor of Siberia in Tobolsk, 1716)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Si 1/131

Fig. 170  
Carved wooden plaque in the shape of a vulture with open wings, excavated by N. V. Polosmak in mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3. Novosibirsk Museum

Fig. 171  
Gold armlet with griffin terminals from the Oxus Treasure. H. 12.3, W. 11.57 cm, wt 396.5 g. Achaemenid, fifth to fourth century BC. British Museum, London, 1897,1231.116 Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks





# Scythian-related finds in the Oxus Treasure

The Oxus Treasure in the British Museum consists of some 180 objects, almost entirely gold, silver or gilt silver, plus a large number of coins in the British Museum and other collections, which were found at the site of Takht-i Kuwad on the right bank of the river Amu darya (Oxus), immediately north of Afghanistan, between about 1876 and 1880 (fig. 172).<sup>123</sup> This multi-period site has traces of Kushan pottery on the surface and the unexcavated earlier remains of monumental stone construction visible in section or fallen below. The side next to the river has been cut by its action before the river shifted to its current course; this explains some of the nineteenth-century accounts that refer to finds being made in the riverbed. Although the dating of some individual pieces has attracted different opinions, there is little doubt that almost all fall within the fifth and early fourth centuries BC, although the coins are mostly later and presumably derive from later hoards. Many objects are classed as the so-called 'Achaemenid Court Style', but the variety of functions and styles suggests that multiple workshops were responsible. Some may have been manufactured far from the place of burial, as the style of a nude gilt-silver statuette is most closely paralleled by chariot axle-pins from Sardis,<sup>124</sup> and the natural range of the two varieties of barbel most closely resembling the fish represented on a gold container are endemic to either the Oxus or the Caspian Sea.<sup>125</sup> The closest parallels for another disparate group lie to the north of the Achaemenid Empire and belong to the world of the Scythians, but whether they were made there or were local products intended for sale or barter to Scythian nomads is uncertain.

Almost every object in the Oxus Treasure is a unique item, and those that were originally inlaid have lost their inlay. These two factors suggest that, unlike assemblages interred with the dead, they were either deposited as offerings or were hoarded for their metal content. A long-term programme of scientific analysis is under way on this collection,<sup>126</sup> and the following pieces have already been examined in connection with the present exhibition. **sus**



Fig. 172  
View of the Amu darya (Oxus) close to the find-spot of the Oxus Treasure at the site of Takht-i Kuwad. The site lies on the right bank of the river, which forms the border with Afghanistan, and which is seen here on the opposite bank.

## Scythian-style artefacts from the Oxus Treasure: manufacture and decoration

A group of eight gold artefacts from the Oxus Treasure associated with the Scythian-style art of southern Siberia was studied non-invasively for their technology using binocular optical microscopy and scanning electron microscopy (SEM). These gold objects consist of a lion-griffin ornament or aigrette (cat. 225), a pair of gold bracelets (cat. 226), a finger ring (cat. 227), a possible bow-case attachment (cat. 228) and three roundels (cats 229–31).

Both microscopic techniques capture images at low and high magnifications to identify and record features, tool marks and surface textures that are characteristic of the goldsmithing techniques used to manufacture and decorate the artefacts. Optical microscopy allows overall observation of the construction techniques and decoration of the gold, while SEM allows more detailed investigation using different imaging techniques and analysis. SEM produces two

types of black-and-white images: secondary electron images and backscattered electron images. The former reveal the topography of the surface, while the latter use a different 'illumination' to accentuate tool marks and provide information about surface composition, as the image contrast is based on the difference between densities – the heavier an element, the brighter it appears on the image. The scanning electron microscope is also equipped for energy dispersive X-ray (EDX) spectroscopy, which characterizes the chemical composition of alloys.

Except for the two bracelets (cat. 226), which were cast, the artefacts were manufactured by working gold sheets and wires by hand. Sheets were hammered to the desired shapes and thicknesses from small cast ingots. Further work from both front and back created the various three-dimensional designs from the flat sheet. The deformation of the metal was achieved through cycles of hammering and annealing. Annealing consists of heating the metal (to several hundred degrees) in order to release the internal stress produced by hammering, thus

Fig. 173  
Curling tail of a gold aigrette (cat. 225) made of a round section of hammered solid-gold wire (BSE image, 8x, image width approx. 16 mm).



softening the metal, to allow further deformation and shaping without cracking. Solid wires, such as the tail of the lion-griffin aigrette (cat. 225) and the attachment loops on the roundels (cats 229–31), were also hammered, in these cases into a circular section from a small square ingot. The wire tail of the plaque is a nice example of the choices made by its maker: the leaf-like terminal was shaped from the wire itself rather than as a separate piece attached by soldering (fig. 173).

Hammering the gold sheet into relief from the back is a technique called *repoussé*. It is very often combined with the technique of chasing, or deformation of the sheet from the front. Chasing involves gently hammering blunt-edged punches of various shapes along the gold surface, which move and push the metal in order to trace outlines and produce decorative patterns.<sup>127</sup> To produce the finely modelled decoration seen on these gold objects, most would have been worked from both the front and the back, as shown by the deeply deformed sheets and tool marks on both sides. Chasing was the main decorative technique used for all these artefacts. Another technique frequently used on these Scythian-style objects was punching, to produce smaller decorative embellishments: it was achieved by striking a specially shaped punch directly into the metal, on the front side of the sheet, and thus produced a single design, often repeated. The most recurrent examples of punched motifs are the lines of dots/hemispheres, as seen on the finger ring (cat. 227) and the aigrette (cat. 225) (fig. 174). All these handworking techniques were widely known and used by goldsmiths in the middle of the first millennium BC.

Although the techniques documented here are the same for all the metal objects, several particularities become apparent when each object is looked at in more detail. For instance, the punching on the gold roundel bearing a demon's face (cat. 231) stands out from the main group of objects in that it was achieved from the reverse side (fig. 175). The gold roundel with the boars and ibex heads (cat. 229) is also interesting in that it not only has a significantly higher silver content in its alloy and is made

of a thicker sheet, but also has been worked only from the front and shows tool marks characteristic of engraving (fig. 176). Unlike chasing, which only deforms the metal, engraving entails cutting grooves into the metal with a sharp tool. The reverse side of this convex roundel lacks the three-dimensionality to be expected if the sheet were shaped from the back. It seems more likely that the sheet was worked from the front to create relief and raise the animal shapes. Under the microscope, it can be seen that the edges of the grooves outlining these shapes in relief are sharply cut, indicating the use of engraving. This may explain why a thicker sheet of electrum, a naturally occurring gold and silver alloy, was used for the manufacture of this object, as the extra thickness allowed some metal to be cut and removed.

Finally, the gold bracelets (cat. 226) were cast, most likely by means of the widely used lost-wax technique, and then further handworked by chasing to sharpen or accentuate the motifs. It is not possible to distinguish the extent of handworking used to design and shape the original wax model and that was applied directly to the cast metal object. It is, however, very likely that the high-relief features, such as the eyes, ears, and deep grooves and inlay cells, were modelled in the wax and then finished by chasing the metal to outline and give definition to the design (fig. 177). Some decoration such as hemispheres and lighter lines were respectively punched and chased, probably also directly into the metal.

This group of artefacts shows a wide range of alloy compositions, from high-purity gold to high-silver electrum (79 to 93% gold and 2.5 to 20% silver for six artefacts). The copper content varies between naturally occurring levels in unrefined gold (0.5 to 2% copper)<sup>128</sup> to being intentionally alloyed with silver-bearing gold (4–6% copper for two artefacts). Sources of gold exploited from early times are the deposits of dense metal particles that can collect in pools in water courses. These native gold particles are not pure gold, and usually include a proportion of silver. Another feature of native alluvial gold deposits is the presence of tiny

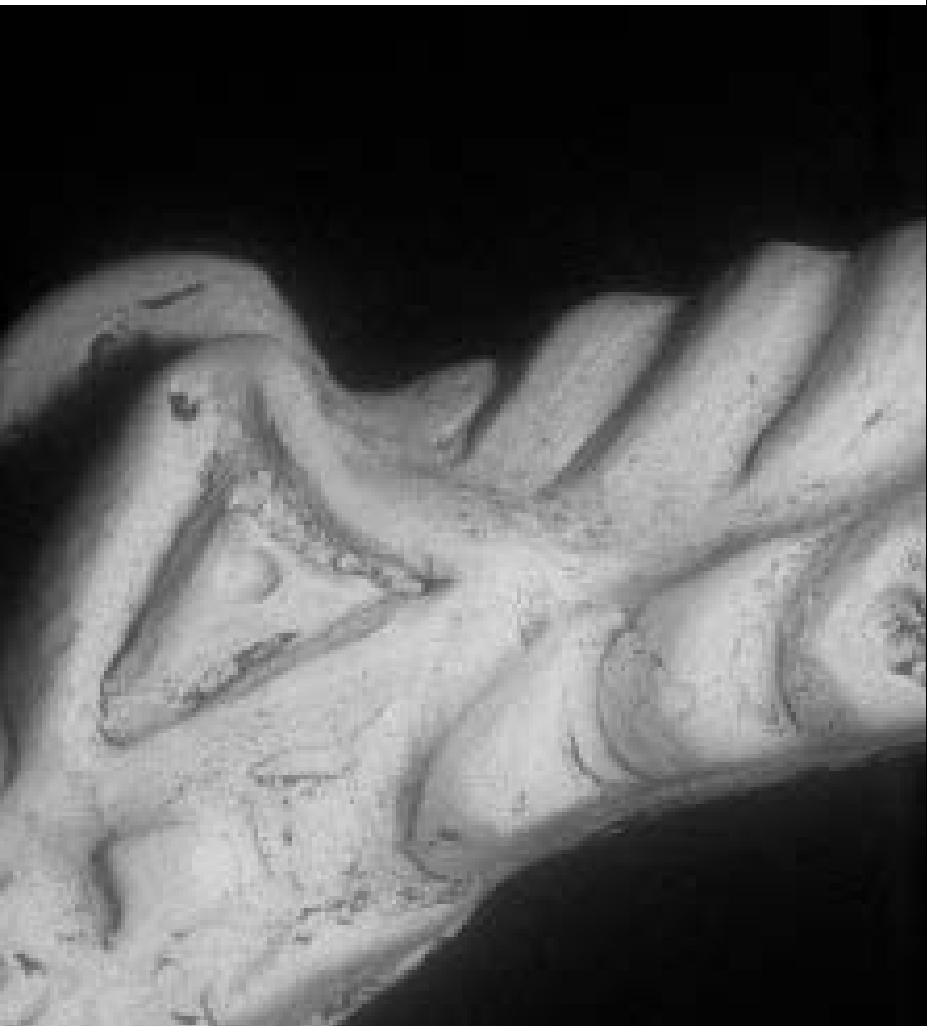
hard platinum group element (PGE) inclusions.<sup>129</sup> Microscopic examination of the surfaces of the artefacts studied detected PGE inclusions on most of them, indicating the use of unrefined alluvial gold. **AM**

Fig. 174  
Chased and punched inlay cells and decoration on a gold ring with a winged lion (cat. 227). Note the repeated identical marks left by the punch that was used to create the row of hemispheres, and the marks from the blunt-edged tool used to deform the metal while chasing (BSE image, 7x, image width approx. 12 mm).

Fig. 175  
Features of the demon face on a gold roundel (cat. 231) achieved by engraving. Note the cutting-tool marks around the eyes and nose (SE image, 7x, image width approx. 11 mm).

Fig. 176  
Chased and engraved ibex head on a convex roundel (cat. 229). Note the marks where the engraving tool has been used on the curled horn but carried onto the adjacent parts of the polished surface (BSE image, 8x, image width approx. 10 mm).

Fig. 177  
Cast and chased monster-head terminal of a solid electrum armlet (cat. 226). The high-relief decoration would have been carved in wax prior to casting during the lost-wax process. After casting, chasing and punching were carried out to highlight details of the decoration (BSE image, 7x, image width approx. 11 mm).







225  
**Gold ornament in the form of a lion-griffin**

This object is dominated by its powerful three-dimensional representation of a crouching and roaring lion-griffin with curving wings, long pricked ears, ribbed ibex horns and head turned towards the viewer.<sup>130</sup> The curling tail is made of a hammered solid-gold wire terminating in a leaf-like shape, and there are circular and curving triangular cavities on the body which were originally inlaid. Scientific analysis shows that it is a complex artefact composed of separate elements soldered together: a body, head, two wings, ears and horns, and a tail. The wings are attached to the body by hollow tubes made of coiled gold sheet passing through a hole in the body from the front, protruding through the back and soldered to it. The horns and ears are inserted inside the head quite deeply and neatly soldered to it. The wire making the tail passes through the body sheet in a similar way to the wings and is soldered to the back. Granules have

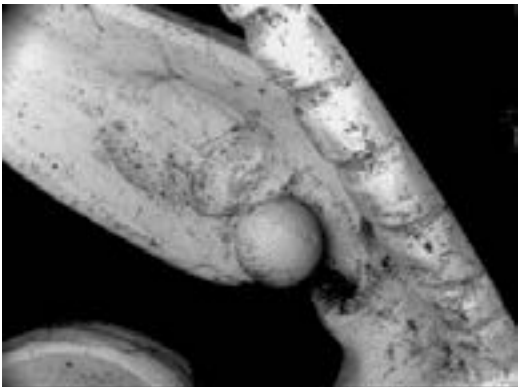
been soldered to the bases of the ears and the tips of the horns (fig. 178). The gold sheets for the head and body were shaped into high-relief animal features using repoussé, probably with the sheets worked into pre-shaped moulds. The decoration was then achieved using chasing and punching on the front. A pair of long square-section straight prongs crudely added to the reverse – soldered into circular hollow tubes – was designed to fix the object firmly onto another material: these may not be original, but if ancient they were perhaps designed for attachment to a tall felt hat, rather than one previous suggestion that the object was ‘a woman’s hair ornament, or that of a turban’.<sup>131</sup> A torc from burial mound 2 at Pazyryk in Siberia has composite figures mounted on it that bear some resemblance to this plaque (cat. 34).

The gold sheets of the body, head and wings and the tail wire are made of an unrefined alluvial gold (c. 93% gold, 5% silver and 2% copper). The surface of the half sphere at the tip of the left horn is composed of c. 88% gold, 10% silver and 2%

copper, also an unrefined gold alloy. The prongs are made of c. 77% gold, 20% silver and 3% copper.

**SUS, AM**

Gold  
L. 6.15 cm, wt 43.7 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.23  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks



226  
**Pair of gold bracelets**

These penannular bracelets are in the form of sinuous-bodied winged horned beasts with long snouts, whose heads form opposing terminals while their tails are interlocked on the opposite side.<sup>132</sup> They are made from unrefined electrum (c. 85% gold, 14% silver, 1% copper),<sup>133</sup> and scientific analysis suggests that the intricate designs were achieved first by casting, especially high-relief features, such as the eyes, ears and inlay cells, and finished by chasing and punching to emphasize the finer decoration. Numerous cells indicate that they were originally inlaid, but no traces of the original coloured contents survive. Dalton believed these bracelets to be ‘Scythic art of the Jaxartes’ and suggested that they represent lion-griffins;<sup>134</sup> a torc from Kazinskoye in the Kuban district has similar decoration, which one scholar interpreted as a bear,<sup>135</sup> but the heads on these bracelets instead belong to a different beast resembling a wolf. **SUS, AM**

Gold  
Diam. 7.9 cm; wt 140.5, 138.8 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.144; 1897,1231.145  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

**OPPOSITE, BOTTOM**  
Fig. 178  
Close-up view of the lion-griffin’s right ear showing a soldered gold granule and the chased ridges of the right horn. Note the large pool of solder around the granule and inside the ear, where it flowed while still liquid metal (BSE image, 10x, image width approx. 13 mm).

Gold finger ring with a winged lion

The bezel is decorated in the partially openwork figure of a roaring winged lion viewed in profile, with its head reversed and its legs fully extended and continuing along the upper sides of the hoop on either side.<sup>136</sup> Coloured inlays originally filled the cavities on the neck, chest and hindquarters, but no traces of these survive. The ring was manufactured by hammering a small gold ingot flat to the desired thickness, with narrower strips either side of a larger area (the bezel), decorating it and soldering the two strip ends together to create the circular shape. The decoration was achieved through chasing and punching, i.e. deforming the metal from the front by gently hammering a blunt-edged tool or a punch with a rounded end into the gold sheet to create the motifs, and repoussé, hammering the gold sheet into relief from the back, to enhance the three-dimensionality of the design (fig. 179). The unrefined gold alloy contains c. 89% gold, 9% silver and 2% copper on the surface.<sup>137</sup> **SUS, AM**

Gold  
Diam. 2.5 cm (bezel), wt 10.5 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.111  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

Fig. 179  
Chasing and punching on a gold ring with a winged lion (cat. 227). Note the marks left by the blunt-edged tool that had been gently hammered into the gold sheet to chase the long curled lines; note too the row of punched hemispheres at bottom left (BSE image, 7x, image width approx. 12 mm).



Possible bow-case attachment with a bird's head

This cutout plaque is in the form of a stylized bird's head with a snake-like tail behind, and with as many as five small loops soldered on the reverse for attachment to leather or cloth.<sup>138</sup> The bulging eye and prominent hooked beak are typical of Scythian art. One scholar has suggested that this piece was attached originally to the tip of a bow case (*gorytos*), and the number of loops does seem excessive if it were simply attached to clothing.<sup>139</sup> In either case, the practice of attaching metal cutout plaques – originally inspired by felt or leather examples – to clothing or horse harnesses was widespread in Scythian territories; they remained a popular feature of later cultures across the Eurasian steppe, as they constituted a form of personal identity and visible expression of portable wealth. Chasing and repoussé were the two techniques used to create the long

grooves and concentric circles on this gold plaque. It is composed of unrefined alluvial gold<sup>140</sup> naturally containing silver and intentionally alloyed with copper (c. 91% gold, 4% silver, 5% copper). **SUS, AM**

Gold  
H. 3.5, W. 2.5 cm, wt 3.9 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.39  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

Gold roundel

The lightly engraved and chased decoration on the face of this thick convex circular roundel shows a pair of boars back to back, one facing right and the other left, each confronting an ibex represented simply by its head.<sup>141</sup> A thick attachment loop is soldered to the centre on the back. This roundel is of a slightly greener colour due to the high-silver content of the unrefined alluvial electrum (c. 79% gold, 20% silver, 1% copper). The decoration was achieved by working the metal sheet from the front only. **SUS, AM**

Gold  
Diam. 4.2 cm, wt 23 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.43  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks



230  
**Gold roundel with a lion's face**

This circular cutout roundel is carefully decorated by chasing, punching and repoussé, with a full frontal and highly three-dimensional representation of the face of a lion (fig. 180). The top of the mane is shown, along with a pair of upright ears that almost resemble small horns, and the border is indicated by a series of close-set diagonal nicks.<sup>142</sup> The style of representation differs from Achaemenid lions, which are invariably shown roaring, with folds below the eyes and a ruff-like arrangement of fur below the head (cat. 223). An attachment loop is soldered to the back. This roundel is composed of unrefined alluvial gold naturally containing silver but intentionally alloyed with copper (c. 90% gold, 4% silver, 6% copper). **SUS, AM**

Gold  
Diam. 4.1 cm, wt 10.2 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.40  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

Fig. 180  
Features of a lion's face on a gold roundel (cat. 230) achieved through a combination of repoussé (i.e. the metal has been worked and pushed from the back, possibly into a pre-shaped mould with the positive design, to enhance the three-dimensionality) and chasing (i.e. the metal has been deformed from the front) (BSE image, 8x, image width approx. 16 mm).

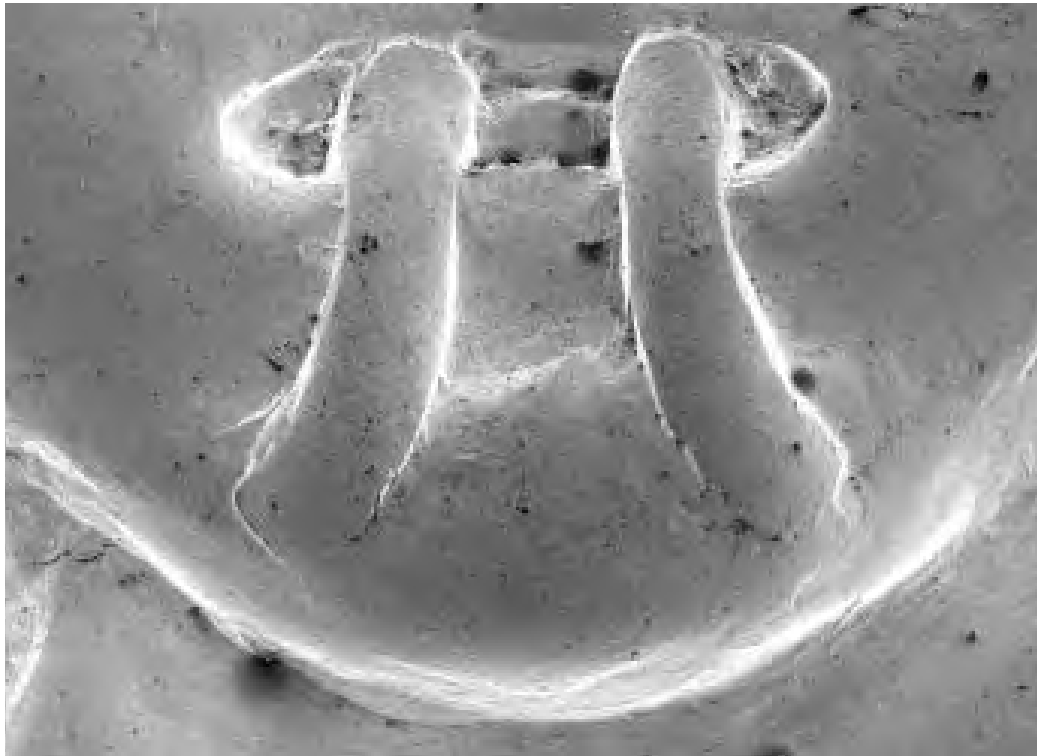


231  
**Gold roundel with a demon's face**

This flattened cutout roundel shows the full frontal horned head of an anthropomorphic figure with heavily exaggerated ears and a pair of prominent but blunt tusks; the lower borders, outer edges of the ears and areas around the horns are marked by a series of repeatedly stamped circles, and an attachment loop is soldered to the reverse.<sup>143</sup> Dalton compared this to representations of Gorgons shown on ornaments found in western Scythian burial mounds, and these too are occasionally shown with tusks.<sup>144</sup> This roundel has been decorated mostly by engraving grooves on the front and punching circles from the back to outline facial features, such as the eyes and ears respectively, and creating relief using repoussé. The sharp, chisel-cut steps characteristic of engraving can clearly be seen around the eye and the tusks (fig. 181). The roundel is composed of a higher purity gold alloy, including possibly refined gold (c. 97% gold, 2.5% silver, 0.5% copper). **SUS, AM**

Gold  
Diam. 4.1 cm, wt 11 g  
Fifth to fourth century BC  
Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan  
British Museum, London, 1897,1231.42  
Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

Fig. 181  
Tusks and mouth of the demon on a gold roundel (cat. 231) achieved by engraving, as shown by the sharp cut marks left by a chisel (SE image, 10x, image width approx. 13 mm).



Foreign textiles excavated at Pazyryk

232 Indian-cotton sleeve with a red hem

This sleeve fragment belongs to one of two cotton shirts found in the second Pazyryk burial mound. The shirts had been removed from the mummies by looters and were badly damaged. It was possible to reconstruct one almost entirely, while the other exists only in fragments. The shirts are made of a light madder-dyed fine cotton material of linen weave, 44 to 45 cm wide. The second shirt was made of four separate cloths, which differ in density and hue. According to E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, they could have reached Altai from south-east China, specifically the Zhou prefecture, where, according to written sources, cotton was grown and thin textiles were produced and traded to the north-west Chinese principalities and beyond.<sup>145</sup>

The better-preserved first shirt was made of three cloths differing in hue and density. The front and back panels were each made in two halves; the hem is widened with four wedge-shaped side inserts, the neckline is rounded, and the sleeves are sewn in and gathered slightly at the wrists (fig. 182). The seams are decorated with cord, and the neck, hem and cuffs are decorated with bright red lace. The size is rather large, as it is 113 cm long and reached the knees, 84 cm across the shoulder and 125 cm at the hem. The large size of both shirts led the excavator, S. I. Rudenko, to suggest that they belonged to men. However, the shirt on the female mummy from the undisturbed burial in burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 on the Ukok plateau (see pp. 100–101) was of similar style and size, was made from 'wild' undyed silk, possibly of Indian origin, and was similarly finished with cord and lace.<sup>146</sup> The finishing on the bottom of the sleeve, neck, hem and seams had a protective meaning for many ethnic groups, as openings and edges of clothing were seen as possible entry points for evil spirits. Fragments of such shirts made of fine linen-weave wool have been discovered in both male and female burials at the Altai sites of Ak-Alakha-5 and Kuturguntas.<sup>147</sup> Most of the Pazyryk burials

where clothing was preserved did not contain any shirts, and the fur coats were often draped over unclothed bodies. It appears that shirts, especially those made from imported textiles, were available only to people of the highest social ranks, and this was also true for the herder population of Central Asia up to the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>148</sup> The closest analogies for the Pazyryk shirts have survived in contemporary and later burial sites of Xinjiang, namely in the mounds at Subashi, Keriya and Shampula. They have comparable styles of stitching, finishing, colour and material, mostly wool but also cotton. Some of these shirts, with the wider and starker finishing, are practically identical to late Parthian dress as it is represented on various images. Sewn shirts or tunics lacking shoulder seams, made of white or undyed cloth, finished at the hem, around the neckline and at the seams with coloured piping, and without the vertical slit at the front are a very ancient type of garment. These shirts were



known in the eastern Mediterranean as early as the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries BC and were worn by nomads. This type of garment, considered Hurrian, existed for a long time in Syro-Palestine and became the basis for the present-day Arab Bedouin dress.<sup>149</sup> **EVS**

Cotton  
L. 23 cm  
Late fourth to early third century BC  
Mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/195

**OPPOSITE, TOP**  
Fig. 182  
Cotton shirt, mound 2, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1684/194

233 Patterned silk

This fragment of figured Chinese silk comes from a severely looted burial, a fact that unfortunately makes it difficult to determine its function. The seams go along its entire perimeter and across the centre, where they cross at right angles; hence it may have had a decorative purpose. Silks were highly prized both in China and beyond its borders, and even the smallest pieces of silk cloth from old clothing were carefully reused. The multicoloured fabric of this fragment was made in the traditional Chinese technique – through complex weaving, where the pattern is made with base threads or different colour (warp-faced compound tabby). Written sources from the Han period, the time when this technique reached its height, refer to such textiles as *jin*. The *jin* symbol includes those for 'gold' and 'silk', literally conveying the beauty and value of these textiles.<sup>150</sup> A considerable number of such cloths have been found in the elite burials of the fourth and third centuries BC in the Hunan and Hubei provinces, which formed part of the wealthy Chu kingdom, the largest in southern China, and where these textiles were originally produced. Among them were found patterned silks closely resembling this fragment from Pazyryk.<sup>151</sup>

This polychrome textile was made with two base colours – dark brown and light green – and a single light-green weft. Thread count in the base was 40 to 1 cm, the weft 18 to 1 cm. It is one of the earliest *jin* examples surviving outside China, and the only example of *jin* from a Pazyryk site. Other textile examples from the elite Pazyryk burials are of smooth undyed silk of linen-like weave. Silk satchels made of such material have been found in the third Pazyryk burial mound and in burial mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3. Fragments of smooth silk from the fifth Pazyryk burial mound were used to decorate a female headdress (cat. 40) and a saddle cover (fig. 165). Fragments of silk appliqué have been found in the first Bashadar burial mound.<sup>152</sup>

The nomad elite seem also to have had access to larger silk objects. The Greater Katandin burial mound, studied as early as 1865, contained a silk-covered 'tuxedo' made of sable fur.<sup>153</sup> One of the felt ladles found in the fifth Pazyryk burial mound was completely covered in silk embroidery. The original length of the silk piece with the width of 44 cm would have been around 3 m. The background was made up of a scale-like pattern, woven from under-processed silk. The embroidery is chain stitched, with four threads of different colours: sand, brown, black (blue?) and red. The embroidered pattern

is composed of vegetation shoots and phoenix figures. Comparable embroideries and lacquerwares with similar patterns have been found in the burials of the Changsha region (Hunan province), which also belonged to the Chu kingdom. It is highly likely that it was precisely the textiles produced in Chu that reached the Pazyryk chieftain burials in the Altai mountains.

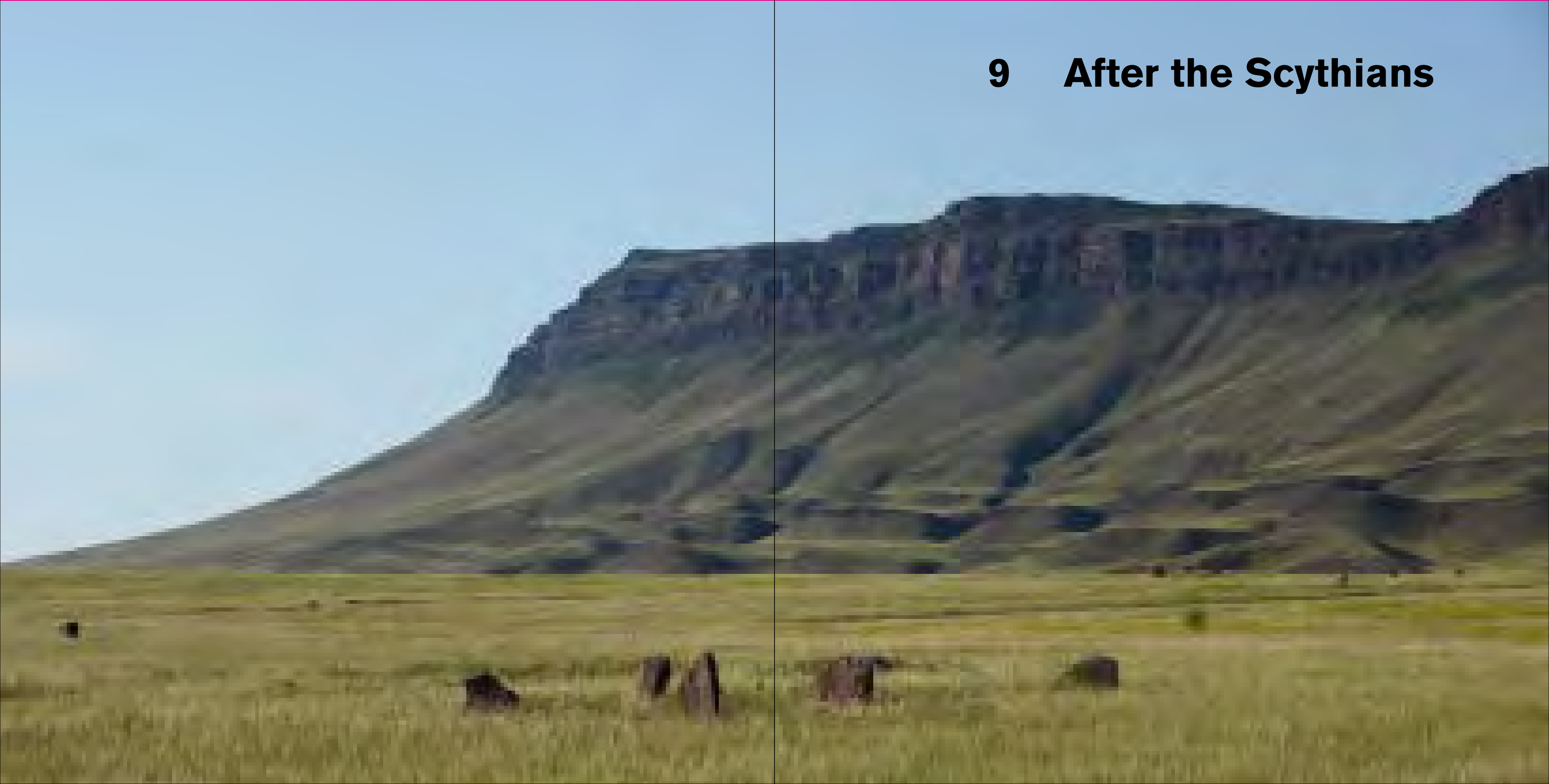
Chinese imports – silk and lacquerwares, a mirror fragment – have been found exclusively in the later Pazyryk burial mounds, dating to the late fourth and third centuries BC. These imports form the basis for dating these sites.<sup>154</sup> It would seem that the trade and other relationships between these inhabitants of the Altai mountains and the Chinese population had only recently been fully secured.<sup>155</sup> **EVS**

Silk  
L. 14, W. 8.5 cm  
Third century BC  
Mound 3, Pazyryk, Altai mountains, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1685/23





## 9 After the Scythians



# After the Scythians

N. N. Nikolaev & S. V. Pankova

Across the Tanais it is no longer Scythia; the first of the divisions belongs to the Sauromatae, whose country begins at the inner end of the Maeotian lake and stretches fifteen days’ journey north, and is all bare of both forest and garden trees.<sup>1</sup>

The Scythians were gradually defeated and displaced towards the end of the first millennium BC by fresh waves of nomads occupying the Eurasian steppe. The plains north of the Black Sea and Caucasus were occupied by a number of Sarmatian tribes such as the Siraces, Aorsi, Alans and Roxolani, who – like the Scythians before them – spoke Iranian dialects and had migrated across the Volga. The precise location of their original homeland remains uncertain,<sup>2</sup> but some scholars identify their ancestors with the Sauromatae described above by Herodotus.

According to Herodotus, this tribe descended from intermarriages between Scythians and Amazons,<sup>3</sup> and archaeological finds between the Don and Volga certainly resemble Scythian ones. In the fourth and third centuries BC, this – probably Sauromatian – region saw an influx of fresh immigrants from Inner Asia whose movement may have been triggered by the conquests of Alexander the Great (356–324 BC). A Sarmatian tribal confederacy formed initially along the Volga and in the Ural region, and later became the dominant political power north of the Black Sea. Their initial conquests were in the northern Caucasus, and at the very end of the fourth century BC the previously powerful Bosphoran Kingdom was torn apart by civil war in which the Siraces tribe supported one side and the Scythians the other. Ultimately the Scythians were forced into retreating to the Crimean peninsula, where they were virtually blockaded. During the second century BC, numerous Sarmatians migrated westwards, capturing a vast territory extending

from the Don to the Danube, which had previously been held by the Scythians. According to Strabo’s *Geography*, which was written in the early first century AD, the Sarmatian customs and manner of life resembled those of the Scythians.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Sarmatian barrows contain numerous golden objects decorated with animal imagery comparable to the Scythian ‘Animal Style’ as well as ancient Near Eastern designs.<sup>5</sup> The fourth-century AD invasion of the Huns ended the last remains of Sarmatian culture, which had already been weakened by the impact of Germanic tribes, and Turkic languages replaced Iranian as the predominant idiom across the Eurasian steppe.<sup>6</sup>

To the east, the Scythians were replaced by the Xiongnu nomads who subjugated a number of Inner Asian tribes both north and south of the Gobi desert. Many historians consider the Xiongnu as distant ancestors of the Huns, but this assumption finds limited support in the archaeological finds, and their origins and ethnic characteristics remain unclear.<sup>7</sup> Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* and the Han dynastic chronicles describe the political history of the Xiongnu and their periodic invasions of Chinese territory to the south.<sup>8</sup> In 221 BC a ruler of the Qin principality unified China, assumed the imperial name Qin Shi Huang and entrusted General Meng Tian with the construction of a Great Wall against the ‘northern barbarians’. This general defeated a number of nomadic tribes in the Ordos region, including the Xiongnu. At the time, the latter seem to have been tributaries of the east Iranian Yuezhi tribes. The ‘supreme ruler’ (*chanyu*) of the Xiongnu sent his eldest son, Modu, as a hostage to the Yuezhi. In 209 BC, following Qin Shi Huang’s death, Modu managed to escape, kill his father and seize power. Meanwhile an uprising in China had overthrown the Qin dynasty. The Xiongnu took advantage of

Fig. 183  
Map showing the main archaeological sites of Scythian and post-Scythian peoples in the Altai-Sayan mountains.



the chaos to subjugate the neighbouring tribes, reconquer lands captured by Meng Tian and wage war on the Yuezhi. Renewed Chinese intervention ended in failure, and in 198 BC the new emperor Gaozu of Han established peace with the Xiongnu in exchange for an annual tribute. Modu proceeded to inflict a crushing defeat on the Yuezhi, which he reported in a letter sent to Emperor Wen of the Han dynasty in 176 BC.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimate victory over the Yuezhi was achieved by Modu’s son and successor, Laoshang; the Xiongnu thus gained control over the lucrative caravan routes between China and the west. When Emperor Wu of Han ascended the throne in 141 BC, he initially renewed the treaty with the Xiongnu, but started to plan a campaign against them. Open warfare began in 129 BC and continued almost to the emperor’s death in 87 BC. In 119 BC the Chinese army crushed them and compelled them to retreat northward, beyond the Gobi. The ensuing migration of the Xiongnu to the Transbaikal region and northern Mongolia brought them into contact also with the inhabitants of the adjacent Altai-Sayan mountains, those of modern Altai, Tuva and the Minusinsk basin (fig. 183).<sup>10</sup> Over the course of the late second and first centuries BC, the local tribes were gradually subjugated by the

newcomers. Chinese chroniclers did not record their history, which can only be reconstructed from archaeological remains: new elements of material culture replace the old, until the old Scythian tradition completely dies off.

The region of Tuva fell under Xiongnu hegemony, as it lies close to Mongolia. Xiongnu graves have been excavated there,<sup>11</sup> and an influx of migrants is archaeologically attested.<sup>12</sup> However, unlike northern Mongolia and the Transbaikal region, this area was not thoroughly colonized, and the grave goods of several Scythian-type burials in central Tuva include both local artefacts and Xiongnu imports, or imitations:<sup>13</sup> these mixed assemblages show that the old inhabitants were not simply displaced or exterminated by an incoming population. Excavated finds from the Aymyrlg XXXI cemetery also suggest that Tuva was not greatly affected by the fall of the Xiongnu state in the first century AD (fig. 185).<sup>14</sup>

These burials were within stone cists, wooden coffins, wooden troughs or stone coffins with planks on the inside. The deceased were laid either flat on their backs or on their sides with their knees flexed. The heads of most were turned to the north-west, and many were interred with meat dishes, some with the heads of horses, cows or sheep. These funerary rites





generally resemble Xiongnu burials in Mongolia and Transbaikal, although the custom of laying the deceased on their side goes back to the Scythian period.

The grave goods include items made of pottery, bronze, iron, wool, silk, gold, amber and semi-precious stones. Many women’s burials contained small circular birch-bark boxes, sometimes decorated with zoomorphic or geometric ornament (cat. 250). Several such boxes held miniature ‘cosmetic sets’ of knives, needles, scrapers, tweezers and occasionally horn combs (cat. 248) or Chinese bronze mirrors. There are also local imitations of Chinese lacquer bowls (cat. 249), though no actual imported lacquers, evidently because these were too costly to be interred with the dead. A curious bone plaque with a ‘tongue’ carved in its centre resembles a Jew’s harp of the kind still played by traditional folk musicians in Siberia (cat. 257). A set of rectangular belt plaques of gilt bronze depict in high relief a running horse (cat. 251), a winged unicorn (cat. 252) and two deer (cat. 253), and evidently marked its owner’s social or military status. Several small appliquéés found with it probably represent deer (cat. 255), while other accessories are decorated with schematic plant designs (cat. 254). The simplified animal imagery reflects the latest echoes of the Scythian ‘Animal Style’. The flying unicorn has many Chinese parallels and may be identical with the ‘heavenly beast in the shape of a horse’ from Xianbei mythology.<sup>15</sup> The presence of proto-Mongol Xianbei belt ornaments in a Xiongnu-type cemetery can be explained by changes that occurred during the AD 90s: once the defeated Xiongnu began retreating from their former territories, their place was taken by

Xianbei immigrants, while many Xiongnu (perhaps some 100,000 households) remained and began identifying themselves as Xianbei.<sup>16</sup>

In the Altai region the Pazyryk culture underwent a transformation comparable to that of the Scythian-type culture of Tuva. The presence of Xiongnu pottery and cemeteries suggests that the region was conquered and colonized, but since Pazyryk-type burials continue as late as the end of the first century BC, some of the older population must have remained and retained their distinctive traditions, while other late Pazyryk grave goods often include Xiongnu-type artefacts or miniature wooden copies of them.<sup>17</sup>

The Sayan mountains must have prevented the Xiongnu from invading the Minusinsk basin, as no Xiongnu-type burials are known from that region. Despite that, the local funerary tradition changed significantly: collective interments in stone-faced barrows (fig. 184) were replaced by flat cemeteries, which indicates an influx of immigrants who for several centuries coexisted with the older indigenous population. Since these cemeteries contain varied types of burial, the newcomers, evidently seeking refuge from the Xiongnu conquests, must have arrived from different regions.

Some late first-millennium BC or early first-millennium AD hoards from Minusinsk hint at political turmoil, and one known as the Znamenka hoard may have been buried after the downfall of the Xiongnu state at the end of the first century BC (cats 234–46). This hoard was mainly of precious jewelry and had been buried next to one of the enclosure slabs of a Scythian-period barrow. Adjacent to it was an enclosed area

Fig. 184  
View of Tagar burial in Khakassia.

surrounded by a 2-m-deep moat and an earthwork measuring 60 m across, and reinforced on the inside with wooden piles that had been destroyed by fire.<sup>18</sup> There were no traces of habitation inside the fortified area, but remains of light yurt-like housing were discovered nearby.<sup>19</sup> The earthwork was possibly an enclosure for cattle and may also have served as a place of refuge, but could not have held many people or withstood a siege.

After 133 BC the basin of the Tarim river in Xinjiang province of present-day China formed one of the main theatres of Emperor Wu’s northern campaign. The region had been conquered by Laoshang and, as it was traversed by the ‘Silk Road’, it formed a backbone of the economic strength of the Xiongnu; since the reign of Emperor Wen (180–157 BC) the ‘barbarians’ were involved in transcontinental trade,<sup>20</sup> and even after retreating to northern Mongolia in 119 BC the Xiongnu strove to retain control of the Tarim basin.<sup>21</sup> Following the final defeat of the Xiongnu in 89 BC, textual sources almost stop referring to Inner Asia until the rise of the early Turkic states in the sixth century AD. The archaeological record of these obscure centuries shows that the local population was mixed and included foreign immigrants. This applies in particular to the Minusinsk basin, whose mild climate must have attracted new arrivals and where the varied landscape offers the possibility of agriculture, fishing and herding. Nevertheless, the local culture maintained some continuity with the earlier, Scythian, period.

A key site for showing this is the third- and fourth-century AD cemetery at Oglakhty (fig. 186). This belongs to the archaeologically defined Tashtyk culture and is located on the left bank of the Yenisei river in southern Siberia. The date of these graves previously attracted differing opinions, with most scholars

suggesting dates between the second century BC and second century AD, and another suggesting a still later date on the basis of similarities of some textiles to silk textiles found at the site of Lop Nur in Xinjiang.<sup>22</sup> However, the problem has recently been resolved through wiggle-matching analysis of radiocarbon dates taken from logs used to construct the burial chamber in tomb 4. These show that the construction dates to either AD 260–296 or, more probably, 372–402.<sup>23</sup> Other new scientific research using isotopic analysis of human hair from one of the Oglakhty burials provides the first evidence for their economy, as it shows that their diet varied according to different seasons – millet and fish in summer and autumn, and C3 plants (such as cereals), meat and dairy products at other times of the year – and proves that these individuals were mobile pastoralists.<sup>24</sup>

The site of Oglakhty was discovered by chance in 1902. There are an estimated 200 burials here, but excavations in 1903 and 1969–73 have only uncovered a small number, and the site is now in a national reserve, which prohibits further excavation. Preservation is outstanding as organic materials survive exceptionally well because of the dry local conditions and hermetic sealing by birch bark. This has desiccated the dead bodies and preserved a number of organic artefacts, including fur and textile clothing, domestic items of leather and wood, and purpose-made grave goods. Most tomb chambers at Oglakhty and elsewhere housed burials of two different types: inhumations (‘mummies’), with trepanned crania covered with painted plaster masks, and cremations, where the charred bones were collected and placed in life-size anthropomorphic ‘dummies’. While the heads of the ‘mummies’ were supported by wooden blocks, those of the ‘dummies’ lay upon leather pillows stuffed with

Fig. 185  
View of the cemetery at Aymyrlyg.

Fig. 186  
View of the burial ground at Oglakhty.







grass. Anthropological data show that almost all inhumation burials belonged to women of the indigenous population. In those cases where the bones could be identified, the cremated individuals were shown to be male. Since ‘dummies’ and ‘mummies’ were normally placed side by side in what appear to be family burials, husbands and wives may have belonged to different ethnic groups. Posthumous trepanation aimed at removing the brain prior to burial, and thus preserving the body for the entire duration of the funerary ceremonies, is attested in Siberia as early as the Scythian period. Since the bodies found at Oglakhty bear no other traces of surgery, they were probably not technically mummified, but may have been embalmed. In any case, their present condition is the result of natural processes.

Painted clay or plaster masks were used in the region from the last centuries BC to about AD 600–700. When excavated they are usually found as fragments, but some show signs of repair: a mask made at the moment of death could evidently crack during the (perhaps significant) period of time before the corpse was buried.<sup>25</sup> Women’s masks are white with red decoration (cat. 260); those of men are red with black



horizontal stripes (cat. 261). The latter are quite rare, since men were mostly buried in ‘dummies’. Ever since the first masks were discovered towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was assumed that their decoration imitated tattoos. This was confirmed when recent infrared photography of a man’s body from Oglakhty revealed drawings on his skin (fig. 187). The symmetrical designs on the man’s shoulders, shoulder blades and nape differ from the Scythian-period tattoos found at Pazyryk, but the antler-like motif on his elbow is attested on Pazyryk felt and wooden objects.

Tattoos are known from naturally mummified bodies in the Tarim basin too, and some designs used on Oglakhty tattoos recur on a woollen textile from a burial in Tarim.<sup>26</sup> This may not be coincidental, and perhaps indicates that the Oglakhty people originally came from that region. Like most ancient tattoos, those from Oglakhty were made with a bluish-black soot-based pigment. The drawing on the man’s neck resembles the decoration of certain plaster masks (fig. 188). Masks painted with charcoal or bluish clay may well reproduce tattooed faces.<sup>27</sup> Red paint on masks may imitate cosmetics, since it is not known if colour tattoos existed in antiquity, apart from a

Fig. 187  
Tattoos revealed by infrared photography on the skin of a man’s body from Oglakhty, including symmetrical designs, an antler-like pattern and an asymmetric composite bow on his forearm.



**ABOVE**  
Fig. 188  
The decoration of certain plaster masks resembles tattoos.

**RIGHT**  
Fig. 189  
The face and top of the head of a stuffed ‘dummy’ from tomb 4 at Oglakhty.  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

sixth-century AD Chinese source that reported how people of southern China ‘cut their flesh and darken it by rubbing red and green pigment into it’.<sup>28</sup>

The life-sized Oglakhty ‘dummies’ are stuffed with twisted bundles of grass and dressed in winter clothing. The bones from the cremated body were collected and placed in a prepared cavity within the chest of the ‘dummy’. At first, cremation was a novelty in the Minusinsk region, but by about AD 500 it had become the main method of interment. The faces of the ‘dummies’ imitate the funerary masks of the inhumation burials: red cloth was stretched over a folded piece of leather that imitates the nose (fig. 189) and painted with almost the same black stripes as those found on a man’s plaster mask from the same tomb (cat. 261). A rectangular slash close to the upper edge of that same mask holds tufts of curly hair. A silk pocket at the top of the leather head of the ‘dummy’ supports a folded plait: this was the typical hairstyle of Oglakhty men. Rather than functioning as a symbolic ‘double’ of the deceased, the Oglakhty ‘dummies’ formed a type of funerary urn. In what seems to have been a kind of compromise between the traditional local custom of inhumation and the cremation ritual brought by immigrants, the ‘dummies’ portrayed the individual whose bones were placed within.<sup>29</sup>

The origin of the cremation-practising immigrants is hard to determine, since many parts of Inner Asia remain almost unexplored by archaeologists, and most of the finds from Oglakhty are made of organic

materials, which generally do not survive and are therefore difficult to parallel. However, some resemble finds made in the cemeteries of Niya, Sampul and Gaotai, all in the Tarim basin, dating to the early first millennium, while others, such as certain types of scabbard and skirts made of horizontal strips of cloth (cat. 43), resemble much earlier Scythian-period finds from Pazyryk, where people had also had contact with the ancient inhabitants of that region.

Long-distance similarities like these may reflect a common nomadic cultural tradition established in the Scythian period. Elements of this tradition were retained by various people and modified through contact with neighbours, immigrants or invaders. A great deal of future comparative research is required in order to clarify this picture, but the Scythian period represents an important formative stage in the history of Eurasian nomads. It was the first of a series of global powers to emerge from this vast region, followed by the Sarmatians, Huns, Turks and Mongols, each of whom played a critical role in shaping the world politics of their time and influencing or threatening contemporary urban civilizations. Their heritage continues in the traditional culture, arts and beliefs of many north Eurasian peoples.





234–246

**A jewelry hoard from Znamenka**

Znamenka is a site in the Minusinsk basin of southern Siberia (fig. 190). D. G. Savinov, a member of the original excavations team, recalls how, on 15 August 1978, one of the field teams of the Central Yenisei Archaeological Expedition of the Institute of Archaeology (Leningrad Branch), USSR Academy of Sciences, was getting ready – just like their colleagues across the country – to celebrate their professional holiday, as this was Archaeology Day in Russia. While the table was being set, the team leader, Mark Lazarevich Podolsky, took a walk to the excavation site in order to check the stratigraphic correlation of the settlement with the adjacent barrow. A few metres from the barrow’s edge, he started a test trench, and when it reached one of the slabs of the barrow’s stone enclosure, a large potsherd came to light (cat. 246). The hoard, part of which is catalogued below, lay hidden beneath.

The hoard mainly consists of items of precious jewelry, which had evidently been

gathered in haste and buried at a shallow depth in a spot that would have been easy to mark. The objects were discovered in a compact mass: traces of organic material indicate that they were collected in one or more bags, perhaps of leather, and the most precious items seem to have been placed inside a lacquered box. All of this suggests that the owner(s) intended to recover their valuables but failed to return.<sup>30</sup> The hoard mainly includes beads and pendants of gold, cornelian, agate, turquoise, amethyst, fluorite, jet, coral, various-coloured glass beads, some imitating banded agate, and small pearls. There are also cowrie shells, two fragmentary knives with gold-covered blades,<sup>31</sup> various shapes of silver bridle ornaments (cats 238–240), a spiral golden bracelet (cat. 234), gold earrings, cast gold plaques (cat. 235), and some iron pins wrapped in gold wire (cat. 236) or thin gold leaf (cat. 237). The heads of some pins are decorated with granulation, and their shanks retain traces of turquoise or coral inlays. Foreign items in the Znamenka hoard show that the Minusinsk region maintained wide-ranging

commercial ties. Several small articles have parallels from the northern Black Sea region, where amphora-shaped pendants (cat. 243) are known from about 300 BC to about AD 200, and striped beads (cat. 244), between about 200 BC and AD 200. The chemical composition of the glass shows that some beads came from the eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and India.<sup>32</sup> The coral beads are also clearly imports (cat. 245). Other pieces resemble finds from Xiongnu burials south of Lake Baikal: faceted cornelian beads (cat. 241) have also been found at Ivolginsk and Dyrestuy in the same region,<sup>33</sup> and the design on a gold plaque (cat. 235) also resembles that on a bronze button from burial 46 at Ivolginsk.<sup>34</sup> **NNN**

Fig. 190  
General view of Khakassia, near Znamenka.



**234. Gold bracelet**  
Diam. 7.4 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/1

**236. Gold and iron pin with decoration**  
L. 9.5 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/22

**235. Semi-spherical gold plaque**  
Diam. 2.3 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/3

**237. Gold and iron pin with decoration**  
L. 10.5 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/24

238. Silver plaques with trefoil and horn-like elements  
L. 3.4, W. 3.6 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern  
Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/35

239. Silver button  
Diam. 2.4 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern  
Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/31

240. Silver plaque in the shape of two trefoils  
L. 4.2, W. 4.4 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern  
Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/34



241. Cornelian pendants  
L. 1.3–2.3 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern  
Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/75

242. Cornelian beads  
A variety of red and orange cornelian beads were  
found in the Znamenka hoard. All were carefully  
drilled and polished. It is not clear where they were  
made. **NNN**

Diam. 0.4–0.8 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern  
Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/65







**243. Glass beads**  
 These are also imports and may be from the northern Black Sea or Mediterranean regions: scientific analysis of their composition will help to establish in which region they were made. **NNN**

L. 1–1.6 cm  
 First century BC to first century AD  
 Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
 State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/98

**244. Striped glass beads**  
 Diam. 0.9–1 cm  
 First century BC to first century AD  
 Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
 State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/102



**245. Pink coral beads**  
 These are long-distance imports: the exact source of the coral is uncertain but was probably either the Mediterranean or Red Sea, as both areas were famous sources of coloured coral beads during this period.<sup>35</sup> Given that the glass beads have northern Black Sea parallels, the route of import was probably via that region. **NNN**

L. 0.3–1.6 cm  
 First century BC to first century AD  
 Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
 State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/90



**246. Potsherd reused as a cover for the hoard**  
 L. 23.5, W. 17.5 cm  
 First century BC to first century AD  
 Znamenka hoard, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia (excavations by M. L. Podolsky, 1978)  
 State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2715/48



247  
**A pair of bone chopsticks**

Across Central Asia and the Near East knives and spoons were the main utensils used in eating; hands were commonly used, but forks were not invented until late antiquity and chopsticks were a Far Eastern invention. This pair of chopsticks is proof that the Chinese mode of eating entered this region of southern Siberia by the end of the first century BC or beginning of the first century AD, and implies a new aspirational level of eating previously unknown in this region. **NNN**

L. 20.8–21.6, diam. 0.4–0.7 cm  
First century BC to first century AD  
Il'movaya Pad' burial ground, Transbaikai region, southern Siberia (excavations by G. P. Sosnovsky, 1928)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1354/6, 183

248  
**Horn comb**

Horn  
H. 8.2 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1980)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/2



249  
**Painted wooden bowl**

The shallow oval shape of this bowl was made in imitation of contemporary Chinese lacquer bowls, and traces of red pigment on the surface indicate it was coloured red for the same reason. **NNN**

W. 11.1, L. 12.7 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1980)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/68

250  
**Lidded box**

This is made from birch bark and decorated with a lightly incised geometric design and representations of animals. In Siberia birch bark was extensively used from antiquity until the present to make small containers, as well as insulating roofing material or covers for tents (cat. 188). **NNN**

Birch bark  
H. 5.9, diam. 11 cm (box), diam. 12 cm (lid)  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1980)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/108





Decorated bronze belt plaques

For many centuries, belts were an essential part of nomadic dress, including that of the Scythians. Large bronze plaques with relief representations of real animals or fantastic beasts could function as buckles or as mere ornament. When gilded, such plaques produced an especially rich decorative effect. They would also indicate the social status of the wearer, as a belt with horn plaques must have belonged to a commoner. **NNN**

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT

251. Belt plaque with depiction of a running horse  
Bronze  
L. 9.8, W. 5.7 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1979)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/52

OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT

252. Belt plaque with depiction of a winged unicorn  
Bronze  
L. 10.2, W. 6.6 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1979)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/79

OPPOSITE, CENTRE LEFT AND RIGHT

253. A pair of belt plaques with symmetrical depiction of two deer  
Bronze  
L. 10, W. 5.8 cm; L. 9.8, W. 5.8 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1979)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/92–93

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT

254. Belt detail with plant design  
Bronze  
L. 6, W. 4.2 cm; L. 6, W. 4 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1979)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/89–90

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT

255. Three belt appliqués with depictions of deer  
Bronze  
L. 3.6, W. 1.7 cm; L. 3.6, W. 1.6 cm; L. 3.6, W. 1.6 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia (excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1979)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/63, 94–95







256  
**Decorated horn belt plaques**

Horn  
L. 16.6, W. 2.8 cm; L. 16.6, W. 2.5 cm; L. 7.2, W. 5.6 cm;  
L. 7, W. 5.6 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia  
(excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1979/80)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg,  
2950/103–106

257  
**A musical instrument**

This type of instrument is popularly known in Europe as a Jew's harp, but it has a long history of use across Eurasia, including the Altai region, where it is known as a *khomus*. It belongs to a class of musical instrument known as an idiophone and is played by gripping one end in the mouth and plucking the flexible central element with one finger (fig. 191). **NNN, SUS**

Bone  
L. 10.3 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia  
(excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1980)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/64



Fig. 191  
Photograph of a woman in the Altai region playing a *khomus*, taken in 1927.  
Kunstkamera 4121/50



258  
**Fragments of a composite bow**

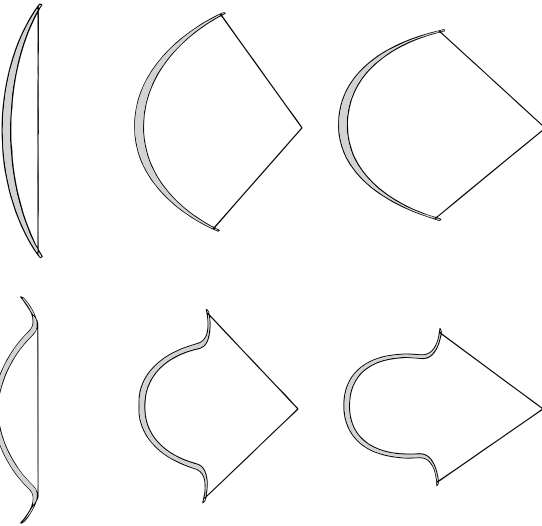
These horn plates or lathes were originally glued onto the handle and either side of the ends or so-called 'ears' of a composite bow, the wooden and sinew portions of which do not survive: the sinew adds tension, and the bone gives compression, hence using both adds to the stored energy and increases the range when it is released (fig. 192). This was a significant improvement to the so-called 'Scythian bow', which lacked such plates. Before the string was tightened, an average bow measured just over 1.5 m in length. An experienced archer could use it to shoot iron-headed arrows over several hundred paces. At medium range, such arrows were capable of piercing practically any sort of armour used at the time.

Composite bows are considered the most effective weapon of the Xiongnu.<sup>36</sup> Their manufacture required skill and experience. Several pieces of specially selected wood were firmly joined together with pins and glue. Certain segments could be wrapped in animal tendons or covered with birch bark. The bow was also reinforced with plates of

bone or horn: two at each end and three in the central part. Experiments show that the advantage of the bone handle is that it remains rigid during the draw, and therefore contributes to smooth action and greater accuracy.<sup>37</sup> The production of such bows was very slow in order to allow each layer to set and cure; it could take a year or more to complete, and for this reason composite bows were often made in large batches.<sup>38</sup> This bow technology rapidly spread. The Parthians adopted the new form of composite, as bone plates have been excavated at Merv and Nineveh, and the Romans soon adopted the new technology.<sup>39</sup> **NNN, SUS**

Horn  
L. 26.5–34.2 cm  
Second century AD  
Aymyrlyg XXXI burial ground, Tuva, southern Siberia  
(excavations by E. U. Stambulnik, 1980)  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2950/109

Fig. 192  
Diagram illustrating the difference between simple (top) and composite (bottom) bows in strung and pulled positions.





The Oglakhty burial ground

This third- or fourth-century AD burial ground is located in the Oglakhty mountain range, 50 km north of the modern city of Abakhan in the centre of the Minusinsk basin. To date, over 300 comparable burials have been excavated elsewhere, but the Oglakhty ones are in a far better state than any others: three tombs there preserve the bodies of the deceased, fur and textile garments, and wooden and leather domestic objects, as well as purpose-made grave goods. Unlike the Altai sites, the excellent preservation is due to the exceptionally dry conditions and the birch bark covering of the log tombs where the bodies were laid, which insulated them from both moisture and oxygen; as the site lies on a mountain slope the drainage is good and rainwater quickly flows into a nearby ravine. The burials were accidentally discovered in 1902 when the ground unexpectedly gave way under a mounted shepherd, who fell into one of the tombs:

On getting out of the hole (which was about a *sazhen* [2.14 m] deep) and overcoming his alarm, the native made a first inspection – only to be scared even more and sent fleeing

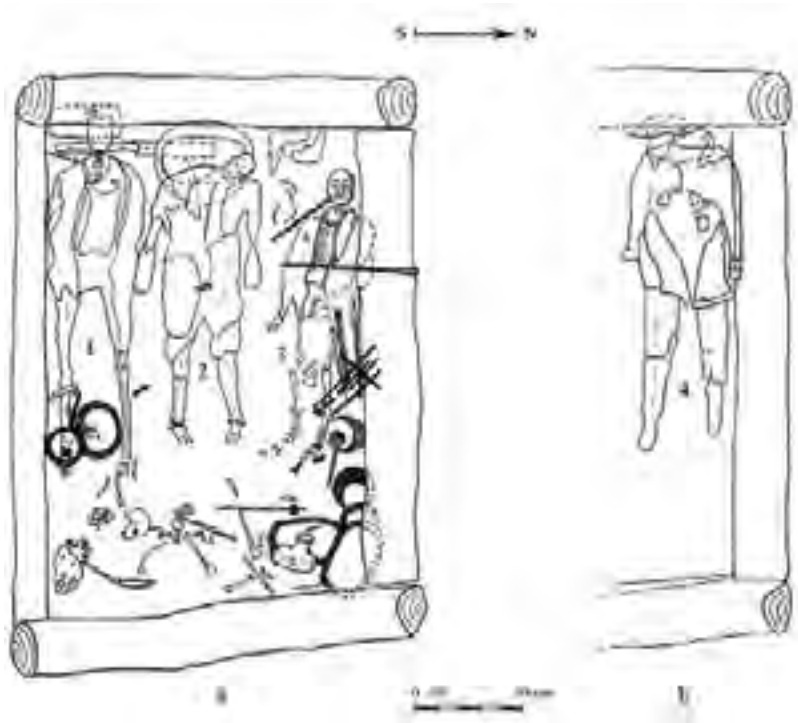
by the sight of two corpses, one baring its teeth, the other hiding its face under a brightly painted plaster mask.<sup>40</sup>

A. V. Adrianov (1854–1920), a local antiquarian and journalist, heard news of the discovery and placed guards at the site, which he excavated the following summer with funding from the Imperial Archaeological Commission.<sup>41</sup> Between 1969 and 1973 L. P. Kyzlasov (1924–2007) of Moscow State University resumed work at Oglakhty and excavated a fourth tomb, the finds from which were presented to the State Hermitage Museum.<sup>42</sup> A 1.4-m-deep log chamber measuring 3 by 2.4 m housed burials of two distinct types: a pair of desiccated human ‘mummies’ with trepanned skulls and painted plaster masks placed next to a pair of life-size leather ‘dummies’ filled with straw, wearing the clothing of the deceased and containing cremated bones (figs 193–94). These finds are usually interpreted as belonging to ‘middle class’ family burials, but it should be noted that no ‘aristocratic’ tombs are known from the same period and region. The positioning of ‘mummies’ and ‘dummies’ indicates equal status. Most ‘mummies’ are female, while the ‘dummies’ were evidently men, although one of

the ‘mummies’ in tomb 4 turned out to be male. Cremation is not attested in southern Siberia prior to these burials, and so it must have been introduced by immigrants. Similarities in the funerary rites, clothing and inventory suggest that these may have originated from the Khotan region of Xinjiang province, China. At the same time, some organic artefacts from Oglakhty recall examples from the earlier Scythian period. **svp**

Fig. 193  
Plan of the finds inside grave 4 at Oglakhty.

Fig. 194  
Two human ‘mummies’ and a ‘dummy’ (left) *in situ* in grave 4 at Oglakhty, after removal of the tomb roof.  
Photograph: Leonid Kyzlasov, 1969



259  
Log tomb

This tomb, resembling a cabin built of carefully trimmed and joined logs, was placed in a 1.4-m-deep pit. Two layers of birch bark covered its floor; four or five layers insulated the walls and roof. The birch bark, being waterproof and antiseptic, preserved the tomb and its contents. Log-cabin burials of this type were customary among the ancient inhabitants of the Altai region, where timber was readily available. Everyday housing was probably constructed in a similar manner. Twelve of the logs used in the Oglakhty tomb come from larch (*Larix* sp.); seven are from pine (*Pinus sylvestris* sp.). Radiocarbon and dendrochronological analysis of two logs shows that they were felled in the late third or early fourth century AD.<sup>43</sup> **svp**

Wood: larch, pine  
L. 230, W. 155, H. 85 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/75

260–261

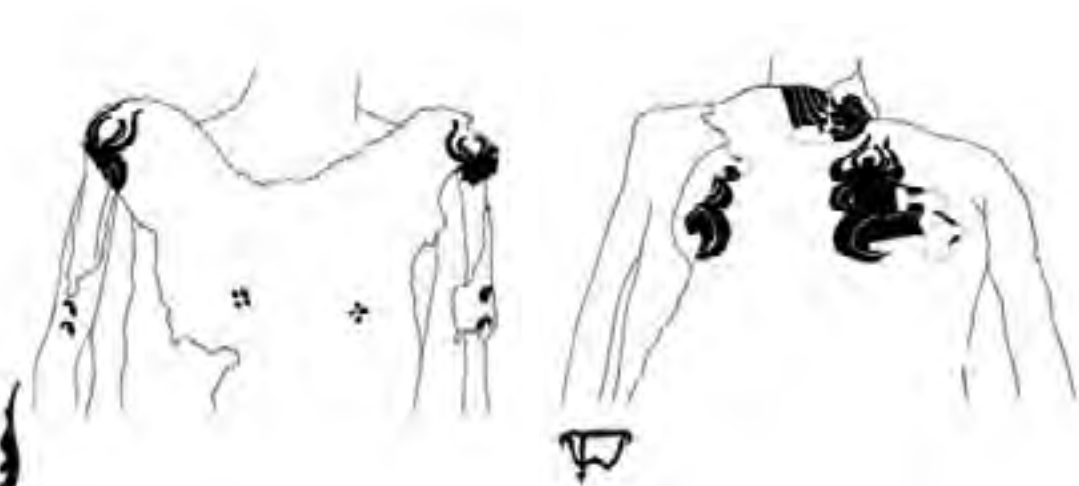
**Painted funerary masks for a man and woman**

Archaeologists usually find thin plaster masks such as these broken into small pieces; these two are unusually well preserved, thanks to the dry conditions at the Oglakhty burial site. The red mask had been placed over a man's face; the white mask, over a woman's. In order to preserve the masks, the excavator removed them together with the underlying human heads. Both skulls had been trepanned in antiquity in order to remove the brains: the man's was pierced in the left temple (subsequently hidden by the mask); the woman's at the temples and nape. Masks of this type are found in the Minusinsk region from the first to the fifth or sixth centuries AD. Towards the end of this period, they were no longer placed on the face of the deceased but on leather 'dummies' with cremated bones inside them. Earlier masks, on the other hand, were laid over the face after it had been covered by layers of clay – corpses were evidently left unburied for some time and subjected to pre-funeral treatment. The connections between the earlier and later type of burial rite, as well as their origins, remain unclear so far.<sup>44</sup>

The Oglakhty masks are made of gypsum containing a natural mixture of limestone and quartz sand. Several consecutive layers of powdered gypsum were poured over the face, which was finally covered with a thin finishing layer of pure gypsum and then painted. The red pigment was derived from naturally occurring iron oxides (red ochre); the black is carbon-based and from charcoal.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes cinnabar was added to the paint, and thinly ground plants or wool were mixed into the gypsum.<sup>46</sup> Before applying a mask, the eyes and mouth of the corpse were covered with pieces of cloth: some cracks in the man's mask exhibited here reveal greenish silk beneath, and similar cloth remains were found under the broken masks in the Oglakhty burials excavated in 1903. Broken fragments from masks found elsewhere occasionally have cloth impressions on the back. The eyes and mouth on the masks were

marked with scratches into the still wet plaster, and paint was applied after the surface had dried. The ornament on the woman's forehead was produced by scratching some of the red paint to reveal the white gypsum beneath. The man's mask was entirely coloured red and then painted with black stripes.

Similar motifs and colouring occur on all known Oglakhty-type funerary masks. It has long been assumed that the ornament imitates tattoos.<sup>47</sup> Tattoos were indeed found recently on the man's body (fig. 195),<sup>48</sup> but it remains unclear whether the faces were also tattooed, since the masks cannot be safely removed from them. A rectangular cut at the top of the red mask exposes tresses of the man's thick wavy auburn hair. The 'dummy' found in the same tomb has a similar hairstyle, covered with a piece of silk whose rectangular outline resembles the cut on the mask (fig. 189). It is debatable to what degree the Oglakhty masks reproduce the actual features of the deceased, but computer tomography has shown that the man's nose had a profile similar to that found on his mask. The examination also revealed that he had strong teeth and a reddish-brown moustache; his left ear had been pierced for an earring. The symbolic function of the plaster masks is hard to interpret. Considering that some bear traces of repair, that the crania of the deceased were opened and that the bodies may have been embalmed, a good deal of time must have passed between death and burial. This suggests an



elaborate funerary ritual, of which the masks were evidently an element. Perhaps they ensured that the corpse remained recognizable up to the moment of interment. **svp**

**260. Mask on the face of a woman**  
Gypsum, human remains, hair  
H. 23.5 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/1

**261. Mask on the face of a man**  
Gypsum, human remains, hair, silk  
H. 20 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/2

Fig. 195  
Drawing of tattoos revealed by infrared imaging of the man's body from tomb 4, Oglakhty.





262

### Woman's hair plait

This dark-auburn human hair plait was found next to the head of a woman's body (cat. 260) and consists of a long plait tied to a bun. X-ray images show the plait to be woven around a horseshoe-shaped support of folded fur or leather. This support's 'bend' was placed in the centre of the long piece of hair, dividing it into two strands that were then twisted around the two straight branches. The bun consists of a small three-strand plait twisted in circles. This plait is so thin that hair for it must have been taken from a small part of the scalp. Its uneven end probably shows that it was cut from the head of the deceased. It may have been removed when the woman's skull was posthumously trepanned at the back.<sup>49</sup> The woman's head may have been originally shaven, with just a small bun left on the back or on top and the long artificial plait tied to this bun as a sort of wig. Similar hairstyles, often kept in place with pins of bone or wood, are also known from other Oglakhty-type burials.<sup>50</sup> **SVP**

Human hair with leather or fur  
L. 245 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/33



263

### Man's headgear with a funeral face-cover

This two-layered hat with ear flaps, a pompom and a back flap is made of fur from a fox cub or puppy. The outside is made of a large dark piece with the hair facing out, whereas the inner layer consists of small rectangular scraps. The fur pompom is attached with leather straps tied on the inside of the hat. Unfortunately, shortly after the excavation, the hair fell off. The right ear flap has a lace that is similar to those on other items of clothing from Oglakhty, including coats, skirts, trousers, mittens and footwear. The back flap, made of narrow vertical fur strips, forms a separate element, but since its lower end is now torn, it is unclear how much of the neck it covered. Ear flaps and back flaps are common on the headgear of Central Asian pastoralists.<sup>51</sup> Their shape may go back to the hoods worn by Scythian-period nomads. Hats with ear flaps are featured on some fifth- or sixth-century carved wooden plaques from the Minusinsk region, depicting battles between locals and invaders.<sup>52</sup> Pompoms are seen on certain rock drawings.<sup>53</sup> A sable fur, roughly stitched to the front of the hat, hair inwards, covered the face of the deceased. Such funerary veils, which symbolically isolated the corpse from the world of the living, are found in a number of ancient cultures, but the Oglakhty example is the first to be found in southern Siberia. Parallels for it are known in first-millennium eastern Turkestan, where the faces of the deceased were invariably covered with silk.<sup>54</sup> **SVP**

Fur, leather, sinew threads  
H. 21 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/64





264

### Small fur coat

When the overcoat was taken off the male 'mummy' at Oglakhty, this small coat was found spread under the man's shoulders. It is made of separate pieces of animal skin, hair facing in, and has a high collar. The stitches at the top of the sleeves and along the shoulders are reinforced, just as on earlier clothing from Pazyryk, with a strip of leather folded in two. The back, sides and sleeves are made of sheepskin, the front is goatskin, the edges are lined with scraps of kidskin and the cuffs are covered with

strips of sable fur. The coat must have been worn by a child and, unlike similar adult clothing from the same burials, has no laces for closing the front. Carefully sewn patches on the back and left front show that it had been repaired and therefore actually worn. This may have been a childhood coat of the deceased man, which he had preserved through his adult life and which accompanied him in his burial. Very small silk garments found with adult burials in the Tarim basin may have had a similar function, although these were made specially for burial.<sup>55</sup> **SVP**

Fur, leather, sinew threads  
H. 35–40 cm; L. of one sleeve 23 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/66



265

### Fur mitten with laces

This was from the man's left hand and is sewn from two layers of fur, although the hair fell off soon after the mitten was excavated (fig. 196). The edge of the mitten's cuff was lined on the inside with a thin strip of fur. The centre of the cuff was decorated with an appliqué of red-dyed leather. Between this and the thumb was a leather lace that could be tied over the cuff and around the wrist. Just like the trousers, coats and hat worn by the deceased, this mitten at first appears to have been part of the man's everyday clothing. However, a piece of fur blocks the inside of its thumb part, so that the thumb could not have gone into it. This may have been caused by deformations in the material, but it is also possible that the mitten was made just for the funeral. Moreover, the unusually small size of the mitten's thumb, which is only 4 to 5 cm long, also suggests that it was not intended to be worn. So far, this remains the only ancient mitten found in southern Siberia, but similar mittens, made of silk, are known from the first- to third-century burial ground at Niya in Khotan, Xinjiang province, China.<sup>56</sup> **SVP**

Fur, leather, sinew threads  
L. 21.5, W. 11.5 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/70

Fig. 196  
Drawing of a mitten on the hand of a male 'mummy'.



Trousers and belt straps

A man's 'mummy' at Oglakhty wore these trousers, made of goatskin with the hair on the inside (fig. 197). Two more pairs were found on male 'dummy' burials in the same tomb. The three are similarly cut, with relief stitches on the leg fronts and small fur patches sewn together at the groin. All are now torn at the lower ends, but originally must have reached at least to the middle of the calves. The trousers found on the 'mummy' have two loops, probably for a belt. A few thin straps with imitation buckles of red-coloured leather were discovered with them but had not been inserted into the loops, so they are unlikely to have formed a functional belt. On the legs, the trousers were held by straps with impressed ornament, attached at the knee areas. The only woman buried in the tomb wore a woollen skirt made of horizontal cloth strips. Its upper edge was folded for a cord that once held the skirt round the woman's waist. That cord, however, was not



found in the burial and must have been taken out before interment. The removal of belts and sashes might correspond to ancient popular superstition: in the world of the living, these are believed to protect their owner, but in the netherworld their role is reversed. The pigment of the leather buckle on one of the trouser straps contains Chinese lacquer, yet another indication of links between Oglakhty and the south. **SVP**

Fur, leather, sinew threads  
Trousers: H. max. 77 cm, W. max. 86 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/69



Straps from the upper part of the trousers:  
L. 32, 35, 40 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/29, 32 a, b

Strap from the right knee:  
L. 22 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/31

Fig. 197  
Photograph of a 'mummy' in trousers with straps and a fur coat.

Model of a bow case with bow and arrow shafts

This miniature model of a *gorytos* (combined bow case and quiver) accompanied one of the men's 'dummy' burials at Oglakhty. Sewn of reindeer hide with the hair on the outside, it has two compartments: one holds a bent meadowsweet (*Spiraea* sp.) branch imitating a bow; the other contains five small birch-wood arrow shafts without arrowheads. The rim of the Oglakhty *gorytos* is lined with a strip of small fragments originating from three separate cloths of *jin* polychrome silk, produced in China and highly valued at this period. Woven in the 'warp-faced compound tabby' technique, *jin* silks featured inscriptions with good wishes for the owner, and several Chinese characters are visible on the Oglakhty scraps.<sup>57</sup> Comparable cloths, preserved in their entirety, are known from ancient burials in the Tarim basin.<sup>58</sup> Like that from Oglakhty, these burials also contained leather bow cases lined with silk along the edge.<sup>59</sup> The Tarim basin may have been the source for the Chinese silks reaching southern Siberia. In the Minusinsk basin, the custom of burying imitation weapons with the dead existed since Scythian times, but although some Oglakhty burials contained wooden daggers and sheaths, no metal arrowheads or other weapons have been found. Miniature bridles, belt accessories and costume ornaments are also found. **SVP**

Fur, feathers, leather, sinew threads, silk, wood  
L. 41.5, W. 13 cm  
Late third or early fourth century AD  
Tomb 4, Oglakhty burial ground, Minusinsk region, southern Siberia  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2864/21



# Notes

## Introduction (pp. 10–15)

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137 Except where otherwise specified, compositional analysis was acquired on a subsurface area using SEM EDX analysis.

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**St John Simpson, Svetlana Pankova**

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